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Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Module:	Research Method ………
Lecturer:	Thesis Supervisor: Dr.Louise Maguire ………
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Project Title:	The Impact of FOMO on Cause Based Event Participation: Self Determination Theory Perspective ………
Word Count:	15,510 ………

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ABSTRACT

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a popular psychological phenomenon that has become a prominent tool in marketing. However, its psychological effects and impact on consumers are underexplored in the context of social marketing. While FOMO in marketing has been framed in prior literature as a conductor for anxiety, impulsive decision making and post purchase regret, there is limited understanding of evaluating FOMO in social marketing and inspecting it through Self Determination Theory. This research addresses the stated gap by investigating how FOMO impacts participation in social cause events focusing on psychological, ethical and social influences by uncovering urgency and scarcity in a new light.

Five semi structured interviews were conducted with culturally diverse young adults residing in Dublin. Thematic findings were interpreted through SDTs psychological needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy. Findings revealed that FOMO does initially drive participation through controlled regulation such as peer visibility, social proof or guilt. However, due to the context being social causes these emotions transform to autonomous motivation in turn fulfilling moral and social satisfaction. Emotional guilt acted as a gateway to moral fulfillment and social media visibility optimized relatedness whereas urgency and scarcity when ethically applied proved to transform to intrinsic satisfaction.

The study also offers practical and theoretical insights for FOMO marketing in cause based events through SDT lens. Insightful recommendations for marketers and event organizers were discussed along with potential future research. By highlighting the motivational range from controlled to autonomous engagement, this research offers a perspective on FOMO marketing that can be ethically used to support individual well-being and societal good. This paper contributes to the disciplines of social marketing psychology, consumer behavior and prosocial campaign design.

This research challenges the traditional viewpoint of FOMO marketing, urgency and scarcity factors, by showcasing it through a different perspective in social marketing and how it can be transformed to a motivator that cultivates value based engagement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Cause-driven events such as environmental clean-up, benefit associated concerts, blood donation camps and charity runs are increasing in popularity among young adults. According to WARC, 66% of the population have resumed going to live events post covid restrictions showcasing a quick reset to active participation after the global pandemic in a short span of 3 years (WARC, 2023). These events are gaining popularity due to the combination of entertainment, social interaction and moral contribution that are received through engagement. FOMO (Fear of missing out) is a psychological trait that evokes an individual's fear of being excluded from experiences that seem rewarding. FOMO is a core strategy, in recent years, used by marketeers to influence consumer behavior (Good & Hyman, 2020). While Groenestein (2024) suggests FOMO to be solely negative, Gupta & Sharma (2021) shows ambiguity in its negative impact thereby challenging Groenestein's position.

Although FOMO marketing has been studied in creating a false sense of urgency and driving consumers to purchase on an emotional instinct, its role in promoting social and/or charitable causes is less understood. In cause related events, FOMO marketing is used not merely for transactions in business but for the benefit of society, which could potentially make FOMO marketing a positive emotional motivator in regards with social marketing.

Emotional factors in consumer behavior including urgency and social proof is elevated with FOMO marketing (Dinh et al., 2023). However, the ethics and impact of using FOMO in social marketing remains underexplored. Consumer psychology frames FOMO as a manipulative tactic that is harmful and contributes to anxiety, envy and/or regret leading to impulse purchasing (Samsura & Rufaidah, 2025). But, when aligned with social marketing, FOMO can encourage participation for reasons such as moral fulfillment, identity signaling, and a sense of community.

This study dives into the under researched role of FOMO marketing in promoting cause driven events. In this context, is FOMO an effective strategy and is it ethical to use traits such as urgency and scarcity? Does it result in pressured engagement rather than actual present participation?

1.2 Research Aim

My research will explore how FOMO marketing influences participation and emotional engagement in relation to cause driven events among young adults. This research also investigates the psychological and social drivers behind participation, and whether FOMO marketing can be assessed as ethical and can make consumers feel genuine involvement in social causes rewarding them with moral fulfillment without any negative appeals. The main research question of this study is '*What role do emotional and social factors play in influencing how FOMO marketing affects participation in cause-driven events among young adults?*' which is further discussed in Chapter 3.

1.3 Justification and Relevance

According to WARC (2022), young adults in today's world are highly coordinated with their digital presence spending 67.7% of their media time online, making them the "internet kids", constantly exposed to content that they emotionally react in envy and awe of their peers. Therefore adults aged 18-30 are the main demographic in social media participation, which in turn makes them the ideal target for this research.

It is essential to understand how FOMO affects the target audience for marketers to design ethical and effective campaigns. For event organizers, to boost participation among sincere audience members who want to achieve moral fulfillment. Campaigns must be tailored to enhance participants' connection with the cause rather than hype for genuine interaction. It is essential for organizers to want participants to have a connection with the event so that participants form a deeper bond with the brand and build a loyal value driven community rather than a one-time crowd. For academics, to delve into FOMO with the possibility of it being positive in modern marketing. All of this is tackled in this study using Self Determination Theory.

This research also helps understand the growing field of social marketing which focuses on influencing behavior for being collectively good rather than just for monetary profits. By understanding both the emotional driver and ethics, my study adds value to marketing in theory as well as practice. SDT study by Ryan & Deci (2000) state psychological needs of humans and the motivators they require for their own personal growth and to grow socially through

relatedness, competence and autonomy. This framework would essentially be perfect to analyze findings of this study in relations to psychological, ethical, and social drivers that impact participation in cause based events.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the demographic of young adults aged 18-30, who have participated in a cause-driven event in the past 5 years, and campaigns that use FOMO in their marketing strategy (urgency, peer visibility, exclusive).

The research gap involves FOMO marketing in other commercial campaigns, broader age range, and inherits limitations from quantitative behavior prediction as this is a qualitative study. The findings will show perceived motivations and emotions and not clear numerical measurements.

1.5 Chapters Overview

This research is a quantitative style project done to examine the impact of FOMO in participation of cause based events using SDT as the guiding framework. Chapter 2 will focus on existing literature that is relevant to FOMO marketing followed by a brief overview of the theoretical framework and address literature gap. Chapter 3 will discuss the research questions and justify their relevance to this study. Chapter 4 will display the methodology that is used to gather data from semi structured interviews conducted to base results for this paper. The findings from the collected data will be showcased in chapter 5, forming themes and sub themes that are formulated based on the narratives received. Chapter 6 would essentially break down the findings and translate them into discussions by observing them through SDT, followed by addressing the research questions, practical recommendations, limitations of the study and potential future research opportunities. The final chapter will be the conclusion which will briefly summarize the full dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study reviews existing literature involving FOMO marketing in context with cause driven events among young people by focusing on emotional, social and ethical elements. It aims to understand how FOMO influences participation in both psychology and strategy in social marketing. It forms findings from consumer psychology, digital marketing, social influence and moral motivation to provide critical foundation for research.

Although FOMO marketing, impulse buying and scarcity purchasing has been gaining traction in commercial contexts, it remains underexplored in prosocial events (Kim, et al., 2020, Hamilton & Hosany, 2023, Nurmalasari, 2024). This literature gap omits the understanding of FOMO marketing and its potential in cause related events. Key themes reviewed are FOMO in consumer behavior, digital marketing in relations to FOMO, social proof and influence, moral fulfillment and ethical concerns of the use of FOMO, that are identified through briefly outlined literature gap and their relation to the research aim.

Similar to existing studies on FOMO, this research uses Self Determination Theory as its guiding theoretical framework (Sasumra & Rufaidah, 2025, Kim et al 2020, Dursun et al 2020). SDT states that human motivation is driven by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci 2000). These three psychological needs will be used to access if FOMO driven marketing in cause related events supports or undermines participants and their intrinsic needs. The literature review is organized thematically, followed by an overview of SDT and a discussion of existing academic literature gaps.

2.2 FOMO in Consumer Behavior

FOMO is a very popular term in the digital world that is used to create anxiety in individuals who perceive others to be experiencing a much more rewarding life than themselves. In consumer behavior literature, FOMO arises from perceived scarcity and exclusion from social groups by young adults who feel they would miss out on life experiences their peers have. Hamilton and Hosany (2023) describe FOMO as an effective motivator that impacts consumer decision due to urgency and scarcity tactics in marketing. However, Nolan (2021) states that

these emotional triggers are much more enhanced depending on context, that is, events or lifestyle related activities that are linked to perceived self-identity is what sets off FOMO.

FOMO in marketing is popular for its role in impulse buying behavior causing increased impulse shopping and post-purchase regret (Nurmalasari, 2024). These studies place FOMO in a negative space, however it has the potential to serve as a positive motivational cue leading to meaningful participation or identity signaling by understanding the application of FOMO marketing mechanisms in prosocial events rather than commercial purchases.

In 2020 Superbowl a study was conducted through 2 online questionnaires distributed before and after the Superbowl. Study 1 assessed whether FOMO made people want to partake in watching sports while the second study was on whether FOMO had an impact on satisfaction levels. The first study concluded people watched the sport despite constraints because of FOMO enhancing participation levels so as to not be socially excluded, however, the second study shows that although 5.8% were satisfied with the experience on a personal level (intrinsic reward), 26% were satisfied only due to the social aspect (extrinsic reward) (Kim, et al., 2020). However, this study is based on a large scale sporting event whereas in pro social context motivation may be more moral value driven than entertainment value.

By young adults responding to FOMO through activities that are socially and morally fulfilling and deriving personal value and ethical commitments from this engagement complicates the 'negative driver' label it currently possesses. This side of FOMO may be justified as in the bigger picture it makes people reflect and be better individuals of the society, undermining the other side of FOMO being related to impulse buying or post purchase regrets.

2.3 FOMO in Digital and Event Marketing

Digital marketing has profoundly expanded using FOMO tactically, particularly in promoting events (Dursun et al., 2023). Social platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok and Youtube intensify the comparison between young adults which work as the core of the FOMO mechanism, making the youth believe that they are excluded from a certain lifestyle they require. Proof in the digital world such as posts, stories, hashtags and livestreams are strong factors that persuade the audience to take part and engage with what's trending. Rachmad (2024), found that in social media marketing, using urgency directly resulted in more purchase decisions and participation

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rather than informational videos, however Zamfir (2024) states that while urgency and scarcity works to bring in consumers in the long run it erodes trust and decreases credibility of the brand.

Event marketing on digital platforms constantly shows limited seating, countdowns and pre-sales to enhance excitement, induce FOMO and showcase every event as an absolute 'must attend'. This tactic creates a sense of feeling that attending this event is the same as social inclusion and higher self-worth, but raises concern whether the psychological feeling of fulfillment is for the sake of social proof or is genuine engagement (White, 2015).

In the case of events that are aligned with social and/or charitable causes participants may be persuaded with FOMO so that they can appear socially responsible than to be a part of the contribution in society. Recent brand activism literature recognizes participating in such events and posting it online can inadvertently serve as both genuine and pretentious such as when brands voice out political or social opinions (Kumar et al., 2025). This duality of FOMO marketing makes it interesting to debate on whether it is ethically right to be used or not with regards to marketing.

2.4 Social Proof and Peer Influence

Social proof is an important mechanism that works to amplify FOMO and is a common motivation for young adults to take photos and videos in today's world, that is, display of social proof (Arunkumar et al., 2023). This increases engagement for partaking in charitable events, especially by Gen Z and Millennials, however there is limited literature on digital marketing influence and its impact on cause driven events. Moreover, visibility of friends and peers through social proof builds trust in the event being worthwhile. Research by Kim, Kim & Lee (2021) states that the 4 motivators that prompt people to engage in events seen online are – information, entertainment, reward and social connection.

Nearly 68% of young adults spend their time on social media making them highly aware of their peers whereabouts, especially in participative events and experiences (Huang, 2022). FOMO is defined as a psychological act where humans conform to other people's decision making that reflects what they consider the right behavior. Peer influence with cause related activities is experienced in admiration, societal pressure, and inspiration. Causes such as group oriented or identity-based causes, for example, global warming, climate change and sustainability causes or social justice cases and political ideologies for community welfare are

highly influenced by peers. Peer influence outweighs impact in comparison with traditional advertising (Solaiman & Pangaribuan, 2024), their paper suggests that hedonic motivation is a factor that influences consumers to choose emotionally satisfying experiences than merely functional experiences.

2.5 Emotional Fulfillment and Moral Reward

The emotional aftermath of participation after a FOMO driven engagement of an event is very underexplored in literature, specifically in cause driven events. Literature focuses on regret and negative connotations associated with FOMO, very few examine positive emotional outcomes. Participation in cause driven events is associated with an emotional reward or a sense of achievement with personal values. These values when achieved through autonomous engagement from SDT perspective is was cultivates moral reward. For example, a study in 2013 conducted by collecting online questionnaires with open ended questions from participants who did a non-profit MS Walk in Canada found that participants feel recognized for three main reasons – being fundraisers, internal connection to the cause and to form emotional bonds with other participants but the most prominent one was internal connection with the cause (Snelgrove et al., 2013).

Another study in 2022, conducted an experiment in a school by dividing the class into 2 sets of children. Set 1 were given a task with autonomous motivation while Set 2 was given the same task but with controlled motivation. Findings revealed that Set 1, where the children had free will to not do the task for more persistent and felt morally satisfied doing it with their peers while set 2 did not feel any intrinsic reward related to completing the task (Murphy and Taylor, 2022) These outcomes showcases autonomy is a stimulant for moral fulfillment.

Literature regarding experiential marketing states that engaging consumers with emotions and genuine experiences strengthens consumer brand relationship and deepens long term brand loyalty (Nadeem, 2021). In social marketing, this would imply that using FOMO to influence consumers could lead to more than just attendance, it could also build deep relationships with strong ties of emotions to cause.

2.6 Ethical Considerations in FOMO-Based Social Marketing

Although there seems to be potential positivity with FOMO in social marketing, its ethical implications are highly ambiguous. Researchers have questioned how emotional manipulation

such as campaigns related to urgency, guilt and exclusion can appear more deceptive than genuine promotion (Antonetti and Baines, 2015). Marketers must make clear boundaries for tactics that are motivating and tactics that are coercion to determine ethical balance in marketing (Self Sensei., 2024).

With regard to cause driven campaigns, FOMO marketing ethics get even more complex. Although FOMO is known to increase engagement, there is risk of minimizing the actual cause to a perfomatative act. Moreover, if participants feel manipulated, the emotional aftermath may result in confusion to stay loyal, long term resentment and completely terminate engagement (O. C. Ferrell and Linda Ferrell, 2025).

Foundationally, ethical frameworks stand for transparency and full autonomy for participants to be well informed of their choice to guarantee them intrinsic satisfaction (Kotler and Lee 2008). Emotional triggers can be powerful when they are used but it has to be used responsibly, particularly when used for causes that are rooted in justice and empathy for the society which directly related to using FOMO marketing for pro-social events.

2.7 Theoretical Framework – Self Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is a well-known psychological framework in literature that dissects human motivation through the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to a sense of full control over ones' own choice, competence is about the feeling of effectiveness to achieve ones goals and relatedness reflects the sense of belonging and connection with more than themselves. When these needs are present, individuals are potentially expected to experience intrinsic motivation, feel emotionally positive and engage through self-endorsement.

SDT stays relevant to this research as it gives a solid structured evaluation for this topic. It offers a lens to evaluate whether FOMO driven marketing can result in intrinsic motivation or would rely on extrinsic pressure. Since the study is on cause driven events, urgency and scarcity could undermine autonomy, but it may enhance relatedness. It may also reinforce competence if participants feel their involvement has a visible and meaningful impact to their society and their own sense of self.

Applying SDT to FOMO in social marketing provides a theoretical basis for the examination of interplay between emotional fulfilment, social influence and ethical considerations. By

investigating whether FOMO driven participation aligns or contradicts these core psychological needs, this framework helps to understand behavioral outcomes but also the quality of engagement in the cause driven event.

2.8 Literature Gap

Firstly, while FOMO marketing and its impact in the commercial world is well documented, its application in cause driven market is not thoroughly researched. Most studies follow FOMO marketing to focus on its negative emotional aftermath, constricting it to have the potential for a positive emotional or moral outcome.

Secondly, literature for the role of peer influence and social proof in cause related FOMO marketing is underexplored as well. These topics are discussed with general marketing but there is limited availability of studies with how they align with social motivation.

Lastly, ethical considerations are subjective to individuals and lacks a quantifiable measure. As perception of right and wrong in ethics may vary, the research conclusions may also vary since this study uses qualitative research to explore how young adults respond emotionally to FOMO marketing in cause based campaigns.

2.9 Conclusion

The literature review has expanded on themes related to FOMO, social proof, emotional fulfillment and ethical considerations with regards to marketing in cause driven events and social marketing. Since FOMO is seen as a negative factor in consumer behavior, its effect in social marketing has potential to be more positive – where exclusion and urgency tactics can provide a meaningful and rewarding experience.

However, this fulfillment is not guaranteed and must be tested against the risk of emotional manipulation to the participants in the form of scarcity or urgency. The next chapter will form the research question to further solidify the focus of the investigation.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to understand the role of FOMO based marketing in cause related event participation among young adults focusing on emotional and social factors that affect engagement. Since FOMO marketing has predominantly been studied as a negative factor in consumer behavior, applying it to pro-social cause driven marketing can give it a meaningful engagement that rewards participants with moral fulfillment.

This research dives into the underexplored area of marketing literature of how FOMO can be strategically used to support socially driven events without compromising on ethical principles. This research is done through qualitative insights from previous participants' perceptions using interviews to understand experiences and emotions that have shaped young adults' decision making to attend these events and their feedback on how they felt afterwards.

Main Research Question

What role do emotional and social factors play in influencing how FOMO marketing affects participation in cause-driven events among young adults?

This question is formed on the basis that FOMO marketing can potentially do good for consumers. For participation in social causes such as charity events, sustainability campaigns or community activist campaigns, emotional and social reasoning may be justified. This research aims to fully understand how FOMO interacts with an individuals' self-identity, personal values and social status.

Sub Questions:

1. **Does FOMO interact with moral and emotional rewards in these events?**

This question dives into whether people experience any psychological gratification such as increase in moral self-image, pride or gratitude after participating in a social cause driven event that they initially went into due to FOMO. The aim is to explore whether FOMO appeals can enhance not only participation but also a sense of emotional fulfillment and therefore challenging the assumption that FOMO is primarily a fear based motivating factor.

2. **To what extent does societal influence and social media dictate the decision to participate?**

Since FOMO is related to society, this question is about the influence of peer behavior, social proof and digital metrics for example, Instagram stories, event hashtags and other social media tags of participation. The objective is to understand whether social validation of these experiences are a strong motivational factor for individuals rather than just moral validation and to what extent social platforms can intensify this effect for each participant.

3. **To what extent is FOMO seen as ethically acceptable tactic in marketing by young adults in cause related events?**

While guilt and exclusion can increase engagement and participation, they raise ethical concerns as these tactics purposefully aim to trigger negative emotions for brand benifit. This question critically examines the ethics of FOMO messaging, to understand boundaries between emotional persuasion and emotional manipulation. The objective is to know whether young adults perceive these methods as empowering or exploitative with regards to moral and social values.

These research questions together form a multi-dimensional analysis of how emotions, peer influence and ethics are shaped in response to FOMO marketing. This study is designed to go dive into the complexity of the matter adding literature on FOMO in social marketing, consumer behavior and psychology. Additionally, this study contributes to conscious ethical understanding of how FOMO marketing can be used for the social good without losing consumer integrity.

CHAPTER 4: METHADOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter studies the methodological frameworks that help explore how emotions and social factors often intersect in framing the effects of FOMO based marketing in cause driven events among young adults. Since the themes in question are subjective and can differ from person to person as its about emotional perspectives and ethical interpretations, a qualitative research design has been selected. This chapter will justify research philosophy, research design, sample selection, data collection method that is semi-structured interviews and analytical strategy that is thematic analysis of the interviews.

This study aims to produce insights through experience-based perceptions of young adults and how they view, respond and judge FOMO based marketing to engage and participate in cause related events that are promoted to reward them with social or moral fulfillment.

4.2 Research Philosophy

This research firmly stands with reality being subjective and each person can construct their own through individual perception. Thus this study uses an interpretivist philosophical stance of consumers by recognizing that meanings behind personal experiences and social context are not always rigid. Interpretivism is the opposite of positivism in that it rejects the idea that reality is objective and focuses mainly on participants' viewing of the subject matter and its effects on them (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophy aligns with my research goals to examine the lived experiences of young adults who are engaging with emotionally charged marketing for events that are presented as socially or emotionally rewarding.

As the study is set on understanding the complexities of motivators linked to FOMO and social marketing to be subjective, a qualitative methodology is the better approach. Although quantitative research is useful for hypothesis with fixed measurements and for a better conclusion on some subject matters with a quantifiable outcome, on this particular topic it would be limiting in capturing the emotions and ethical reflection from participants.

The study follows an inductive reasoning process to pursue patterns and meanings that are formed naturally through participants' answers rather than being constrained with fixed measures that are decided prior through questionnaires. This inductive logic is generally used

in qualitative studies that are aimed at understanding new perspectives and widen research on underdeveloped queries to better speculate them (Bryman, 2016).

4.3 Research Design

An exploratory qualitative investigation is conducted using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool. This choice is the best approach as the interviews held are for the purpose of deriving how participants see and make sense of FOMO based marketing with respect to moral or value-driven events such as charity runs, fund raising concerts and sustainability related campaigns.

Semi structured interviews are firm but flexible. They are prepared through guided questions which still offer freedom to clarify themes and unexpected responses. These interviews help navigate the subject within a framework yet doesn't solidify the results out of the participants' view. This is a crucial part of the research as the focus is on individual perceptions, their values, and ethical judgement to be calculated without boundaries (DiCicco Bloom and Cravtree, 2006).

This study aims to offer deep contextualized insights into the minds of consumers who interact directly with cause related events and their interpretation of events occurred. Therefore, qualitative interviews are not just about collecting opinions, they are the source for interpretive exploration. Unpacking meaningful patterns behind the experiences gained by the participants through their own uncensored responses makes the analysis much stronger.

4.4 Sampling Strategy

4.4.1 Sampling Method

In this study, non-probability techniques of purposive sampling and snowball sampling are used through which participants are selected on the basis of certain characteristics that are relevant to the research question (Patton, 2014). These characteristics include the following:

- Aged between 18-30
- Have taken part in at least one cause-related event in the past 5 years
- Is exposed to digital or social media promotions for cause related events

Purposive sampling is done to ensure that participants in this research have recently had direct relevant experience that enhances the credibility of the findings (Etikan et al., 2016). Snowball

sampling is done to receive a much diverse participation in the study for a wider range. The decision to focus on young people is due to their high interaction with digital marketing and feelings such as FOMO being a part of today's youth culture with social media presence.

4.4.2 Sample Size

The target sample size is 4 to 6 participants. In qualitative research, there is a point at which no new themes are discovered, this is called data saturation, at which point, the criteria for sample is met (Guest et al., 2006). Despite the sample size being small, this size allows for deeper engagement with each respondent and is manageable for a profound analysis of the data.

Participants are recruited through flyers set on bulletin boards with the selection criteria in student accommodations in Dublin and snowball sampling for a more diverse sample size.

4.5 Data Collection – Semi-Structured Interviews

4.5.1 Interview Guidelines

The interviews will be conducted in English lasting between 25-45 minutes each. A semi structured interview guide is developed based on themes from the literature review including aspects of FOMO perception, motivation through personal morals, peer influence, social proof, emotional responses, ethical interpretation and moral fulfillment (see Appendix 5).

4.5.2 Audio Recording and Transcription

All the interviews are audio recorded and transcribed with consent. Transcripts are anonymous and stored securely in a hard disk.

4.6 Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clark (2006) have a six-phase model using thematic analysis followed in this research for data analysis. The six phases were as following -

1. Familiarization - Repeatedly listening to the interviews and understanding the responses by completely immersing in the data.
2. Generating Initial Codes - Noting key phrases and emotions while highlighting repeated ideas.
3. Searching for themes - Grouping the phrases and emotions under thematic categories such as moral reward, social validation and ethical discomfort

4. Reviewing themes - Thoroughly polishing themes to make sure they are meaningful and aligned with both the research and the data.

5. Defining and naming themes - Naming these themes and providing clear definitions for each of the headings and subheadings.

6. Producing the report - Jotting down findings with a full analysis of the discoveries.

Manual coding of the data has been chosen as the sample size is manageable, and this research aims to be immersive by engaging with the data collection as it's emotionally relevant for the most part.

Thematic analysis was conducted for its flexibility and can help unpack latent meanings within the responses easily (Clark & Braun, 2013). It allows for theoretical themes such as social identity and moral satisfaction to guide interpretation without blocking the sample set into previously defined frameworks.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

This research follows the ethical conduct from the National College of Ireland Ethics Committee. All participants were provided with the required Consent Form Sheet specific to qualitative research (see Appendix 2) that shows participation was voluntary for the research along with the full agreement of roles between the researcher and the participant throughout the period of data collection till the final process of this study. They were also provided with an information letter and debriefing sheet that explained what this paper is about and gratitude note respectively (see Appendix 3 & 4).

The form included the following key clauses:

1. Participants volunteer and sign consent for partaking in this study with the knowledge of their right to withdraw at any time without explanation and to skip questions if they wish.

2. All information gained through these interviews will be treated with confidentiality.

3. Identities of the participants will remain anonymous at every point of the research process.

4. Recordings of the interview will be taped along with verbal consent

5. Audio tapes will be kept securely with the researcher until the thesis results are announced.

6. A brief understanding of the study was explained to the participants where they were presented the opportunity to clarify any questions they had regarding the discussions on this paper

7. Direct quotes will be used in the research

8. Full transcripts may be added to the research on the conditions that names be removed maintaining anonymity (available on request).

Since the topic of 'ethics' itself was used in this paper as a research sub question, the questions in the interview are phrased in non judgmental language probing them toward no direction but their own personal calculation of ethics.

4.8 Limitations

However, the small sample size is limiting in generalizing or concluding a "correct" answer to the research question outside the boundaries of 5 people. Secondly, there is potential for self-reporting bias as participants would want to portray their emotions differently, as it is regarding discussing moral and ethical views from different from what they internally feel to what they think is the right emotions to feel.

Participants could feel the need to describe and justify their behavior in social terms for less judgement if they feel differently despite anonymity of their identity, it may not be fully eliminated. Lastly, the study is based on retrospective accounts of the narration, that is, participants may not recall exactly what they felt during the event and could reconstruct the emotion from memory which could be slightly inaccurate. This is a setback for all qualitative research that depends on narrative based research (Silverman, 2002), but that does not necessarily equate as the study not contributing value in exploring the research questions.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has thoroughly justified the use of qualitative research to investigate how FOMO based marketing influences participation in cause related events among young adults. Semi-structured interviews are chosen to best explore the emotions and narratives of the participants to understand this topic in depth. This research follows ethical rules carefully in accordance with NCI standards.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key findings that were derived from the participants interviewed aligned with the objectives of the research questions presented in the earlier chapters. The aim of this section is to showcase a well-structured account of the results by focusing on findings. All analyses will be discussed in the upcoming chapter. The findings are organized in accordance with themes reflecting the patterns from the interviews and insights drawn directly from the data.

The data was collected through semi structured interviews with 5 young individuals who participated in varying cause driven events due to FOMO. A thematical approach is used to explore the data while making sure that the findings are closely bound to the participants' perspective.

Relevant direct quotations are included in the findings to support the standing of the themes. These quotes are added to clarify the underlying decision for selecting the themes and for this study to provide engagement with raw data. However, the identities for the quotes are not represented by name due to anonymity that was agreed with the participants' contribution.

Structurally, this chapter follows an overview of the sample size, followed by the presentation of themes using Braun and Clarke 6 steps. The findings are not presented in the chronological order of the data collection but rather in the logical progression of the themes that were derived. The aim of this chapter is to set the foundation for the analytical discussion to be followed in the next one.

5.2 Participant Overview

This study involved 5 detailed, semi-structured interviews with young adults aged between 21 and 29 who are all currently residing in Dublin, Ireland recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Although they are all based in Dublin, each of them participated and discussed their personal perspectives and emotions attached to the cause driven event that was held in their own home countries respectively. These events included walkathons, environmental and pollution initiatives, societal development, mental health awareness, and healthcare donation.

For the sake of preserving privacy, participants will be referred to as P1 through P5 in this study. The following table comprises an overview on sample size

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Prosocial Event
P1	Male	25	Ireland	Mental Health
P2	Female	27	India	Drug Awareness
P3	Male	27	India	Rural Development
P4	Female	21	Thailand	Waste Management
P5	Male	29	Nepal	Blood Donation

The events were diverse from Darkness into Light (mental health awareness walk and fundraiser) in Ireland, anti-drug walkathon (drug awareness) in India, Building Solur (rural development through planting, anti-pollution walks and educating underprivileged children in Solur) in India, cleanliness drive (beach clean ups for waste management) Thailand, and a blood donation camp in Nepal. All participants disclosed engaging in the event through peer influence or social media reflecting the research interest in FOMO and the digital space for peer competition and validation.

The diversity in participant profile was intentionally selected using purposive sampling techniques to guarantee a distinguished range of cultural perspectives and varying attitudes based on age and gender towards cause-related participation. This variation allows for a diverse range of voices supporting rich themes that grants further exploration of cultural background differences to still have similar motivations and emotional triggers. Even though the sample size is small, due to the diverse age ranges, nationalities and gender, the contribution will add depth and credibility to this research.

5.3 Theme 1 Seeking Social Connection through Events

The most common theme that was unanimous among all 5 interviews was the feeling of social connection being the most crucial reason for participation. Participants spoke confidently about the presence of their friends or peers attending the event being the dominant factor in their decision to engage with the cause driven event. They felt the need to be a part of more than just themselves, to fit into the community, to be a part of a team. Through partaking in such events and by posting on social media and relating with similar posts of peers makes them feel a stronger bond to their friends. Despite the cause being noteworthy in each event, the social element played an equal, if not bigger role for participation to occur in the first place. Whether

it was for spending time with close friends or taking part in an exciting new adventure as a group, the need to belong appeared prominent in all their narratives. Diversity in nationality, age and gender did not affect the consistency of this theme in all 5 interviews.

Seeking social connection through events is a broad theme that directly relates to increasing participation but to further delve into this topic it has been segregated into 3 sub themes:

1. Peer influence as a driver

2. Visibility and social media

3. Inclusion and belonging

5.3.1 Sub-theme 1 Peer Influence as a Driver

Participants shared that their initial engagement with cause related events started with peer influence. The involvement of friends or classmates created a sense of expectation or a desire to join and share the experience. This was framed with enthusiastic excitement to be a part of an event with friends.

P3, a 27 year old male from India, said: "*I didn't even know what the cause was, no itinerary on what we were supposed to do in Solur, nothing was mentioned. But all of us knew that we had to travel together and that felt like an opportunity to have a fun adventure together.*"

Despite P3 being hyped about the event it was less about the cause and more about missing a bonding experience. It was to create shared memories, while another participant framed her participation reasoning as a way to avoid exclusion.

P2, a 27 year old female from India said "*I came to class and something was mentioned in the group chat the day before about some walkathon. All my friends were going to go and if I didn't, it would be weird being the only one who didn't go, so I felt like I should also do it.*"

Here group participation starts a momentum that made everyone want to participate in the event and not be isolated from their classmates. Despite being unaware of what the cause was for this walkathon and having no emotional connection to the cause yet, the decision to participate was made on the basis of feeling odd from the majority. In this case the role of peer influence is not just an invitation but an expectancy to participate stemming from being included in the group. P2 describes her participation as a subtle social pull, as not engaging would feel uncomfortable and she would rather avoid exclusion.

5.3.2 Sub-theme 2 Visibility and Social Media

Social media and its role in strengthening social connections and increasing comparison was also mentioned in the interview. Participants commonly mentioned Instagram and Tiktok as the main platforms they used and saw others engaging in events evoking feelings of desire to experience the same.

P1, a 25-year-old male from Ireland shared *"I grew up here, so I did know about the event but never really thought about participating. But one day I saw a story of some of my friends from primary school doing it and felt a little left out. I felt they looked like they were having a great time while doing something for the people you know? So when the next one happened, I joined in with my friends."*

This quote reveals the emotional triggers of exclusion through digital space. The online visibility of cause related events can make people see a visual of what they potentially could be involved with if they align with the cause. Social media was not only a discovery tool for events but a lens through which people judge their own identity and make decisions about their lifestyle and evaluate their place with their peers.

P4, a 21-year-old female from Thailand shared "*It was a trending hashtag in Thailand – hashtag clean beach party. A lot of people did it, even influencers in Thailand, it kind of made me feel like I had to be there, like if I didn't go then looks like I don't care. So I did it too and posted it."*

P4 felt that her not being a part of this event would make her seem like someone who didn't care about the environment, prioritizing peer expectations than personal values. This participation and social proof was important for her to show that she aligned with the group's shared value.

5.3.3 Sub Theme 3 Inclusion and Belonging

Besides peer invitations and digital visibility, participants also spoke of an emotional reward with inclusion. The feeling of being a part of something more meaningful was expressed. Based on the outcomes of engagement, participants would form a wonderful bond with each other

P5, a 29 year old male from Nepal explained *"When my friend told me about the blood camp I didn't really want to go and said I won't come at first. But later that day I thought about it a*

lot as it would be something we did together for the greater good. Of course I understand that maybe our blood might not have been used to save someone's life, but we were a part of donating to a good cause, and that's probably what humans should do in the first place. I didn't want to miss an opportunity to do something with him for the betterment of this world"

In this context, P5 although was hesitant to join at first felt like missing this opportunity to do something good with his friend was not worth it. The sense of collective action to contribute to the healthcare system was perceived to be important which reinforced him to be connected to the cause as well. The social experience did not disregard the cause but enhanced the emotional impact through participation.

P1 said *"I've never met so many positive and kind people together, it was grand. They were all so nice and I spoke to a lot of them, which is very unlike me. Besides everything else I'm glad I met them and got to interact with them. I never thought I could be a part of people like them. It was a great community to belong to."*

The social aspect of the event resonated with the participant not just in terms of who he went with but also with the new people he met and admired. The social experience of interacting with kindhearted strangers enhanced the experience through the event.

5.3.4 Summary

To summarize, the need for social bonds stood out as an important factor in participation in cause driven events. The theme of seeking social connection is segmented into three sub themes – peer influence as a driver, visibility and social media, inclusion and belonging. Peer influence is derived from participants engaging with the event due to their peers' involvement, while visibility and social media did the same virtually. A sense of inclusion and belonging is a more rewarding sub theme emerging from the feeling of new connections that are formed or old ones getting stronger through participation of cause driven events.

5.4 Theme 2 FOMO and Moral Fulfillment

A second theme that emerged from most interviews was how participants described FOMO in a different way than the traditional sense as it was linked to the desire for moral fulfilment. Unlike FOMO associated with products or services, participants felt a different kind of emotional urgency – the concern that by not engaging or supporting cause-based events, they

would be missing out on doing something meaningful for society. In this view, FOMO was not merely social, it was described in terms such as purpose, guilt and emotional satisfaction.

Participants' data suggests that FOMO was a motivational trigger that was interlinked with participants' personal values, especially when the event aligned with communal betterment. They needed to participate not just for their peers to see that they do good but for themselves to feel that they are purposeful to society. This theme is categorized into 3 sub themes

1. Emotional Guilt

2. FOMO for Doing Good

3. Emotional Reward After Participation

5.4.1 Sub theme 1 Emotional Guilt

Not participating in cause-based events made participants feel emotional discomfort or guilt. The narratives expressed were about letting their friends down or not making use of an opportunity that would enable them to be a part of something that impacts the world for the better.

P2 said *"I felt so underprepared and was so hesitant to participate. I didn't look at the group chat and everyone else wore loose fits as the weather was hot that day. Then I thought about how if I just go back home I would feel so guilty of not being there and doing something useful with my time."*

The use of the word "guilty" comes from internal pressure to act in the values she perceives as good and right. Her emotions were triggered to act on this guilt and make her feel more in tune with her personal values and give back to society.

P4 reveals *"You know how there are so many posts online about charities and social help events and I just scroll by usually, I didn't want to be that kind of girl anymore, who always thinks next time when there's no problem with going now."*

The participant reflects on her actions and her personal values and fears if she does not engage with such events, she is not doing the best she possibly can. Self-criticizing her actions and acting on what would lessen her discomfort or guilt to be someone she can be proud of.

5.4.2 Sub theme 2 FOMO for doing good

In marketing, FOMO is used as a psychological trigger to ensure that consumers act rapidly to guarantee the purchase of a product or an opportunity that they is usually portrayed to be scarce. This particular FOMO is in tune with missing out on doing something good rather than making a purchase out of fear of missing out.

P5 recalls *"Right before donating, there was a queue, and I admit I was getting impatient waiting 15 minutes to do something good. But when I was closer to my turn, they announced that the turn up was unexpectedly a lot and they would be reaching their full capacity of taking blood soon. Suddenly I felt sad, and it was so strange, I felt like I was going to miss out on doing something good. I did get my turn though, which was such a relief and so so worth it, I felt so proud."*

In this version of events, FOMO was described as an internal motivation or a fear of missing out on giving back to society. It was a 'positive pressure' that made the participant more determined and clarified his thoughts on what was right for him despite his slight dilemma while waiting in the queue, his goals for what he wanted were clarified by the thought of missing this opportunity.

5.4.3 Sub theme 3 Emotional Reward After Participation

All participants described feeling emotionally rewarded one way or another after participating in their respective cause-based events. Post purchase dissonance, a psychological state that often occurs when consumers purchase or take part in events that they engaged in due to FOMO was not mentioned by any of the interviewees. Post event emotional payoff, although varying reasons for each participant was worth it for all of them alike.

P3 said *"Although I didn't even know the itinerary and was just happy to go as a group activity with my friends after the event, I felt so good about myself. I felt like yeah, we'd have gone for some drinks this weekend like what we did every other weekend, but this one was special. This one made a difference."*

P4 states *"After the cleanup, the event organizers offered us tea and chairs to relax. While serving us participants, they said thank you genuinely that I felt everything I did today was so worthwhile. While taking pictures of the beach I looked through my gallery of the before shots*

and realized how easy it is to make a difference in one afternoon. It was all so satisfying, me and my friend went three more times after that."

Both participants felt positive after the cause. P3 felt more in tune with his social circle, what they did together and the cause, while P4 felt satisfied with her time spent personally and the results of her work. Regardless of the reasons all participants spoke of how "satisfying" and "fulfilling" it was to part take in a cause driven event.

5.4.4 Summary

To summarize this theme, participants' description of FOMO was intrinsically linked to moral and emotional outcomes. Rather than fear of social exclusions, they feared genuine loss of morals and their standing on personal values. This type of FOMO acted as a motivational force that was framed as fulfilling their desire of acting the right way. Participants felt guilt, a blend of FOMO for doing good and emotional payoff that shaped their perception of their experiences.

5.5 Theme 3 Urgency and Scarcity as Motivators

The third theme that the majority of participants described was the urgency and limited availability of events that also contributed to the decision to participate. Time limited campaigns or phrases like 'only a few spots' spread a sense of pressure that may not be negative but heightens the pace to act quickly. In these reflections, urgency made potential participation into commitments. This motivational factor was mentioned a few times along with emotional drivers such as fear of being left behind or a sense of responsibility to act quickly before it was "too late." This theme is divided into 4 sub-themes:

1. Urgency Creating Momentum

2. Scarcity Proved Social Relevance

3. Pre-Event Buzz Builds Anticipation

4. Action Over Hesitation

5.5.1 Sub-Theme 1 Urgency Creating Momentum

Participants described how their decision to attend the cause-based event had to be a rapid one due to urgency. Through social media posts or peer messaging the communication was pushy and the turnover from passive awareness of the event was turned to active decision making.

P2 said *"Since I missed the messages from before and it was already the day of the walkathon, I wasn't sure I could register. But they came in and said they could accommodate 4 more people for the event if they registered in the next 10 minutes and I was so relieved, I immediately raised my hand to register. It felt like it a now or never moment."*

P2 was aware of the event but contemplated not attending it as she was under prepared for it. But her decision was final due to the uncertainty of attending it if she delayed her decision further. In this case, urgency was a fundamental reason for quick action. The time limit was a nudge that simplified the decision-making process to a quick yes. It measured whether to attend now or miss out and enabled her to take quick action.

5.5.2 Sub theme 2 Scarcity Proved Social Relevance

Some participants also felt like the fact that the cause-based event had limited availability meant that the event was popular and clearly had hype. This in turn, made them perceive the event with more importance.

P4 recalls "*When I went to the registration page from Instagram, the clean up site had only 14 or 16 slots available. I don't remember exactly how many but less than 20, so I quickly applied. I did not want to overthink it and miss an opportunity, clearly everyone was signing up for it."*

This recollection suggests that scarcity meant that a lot of people were signing up for the event and the slots were filling up which clearly meant to the participant that the event was valuable and fully validated her attendance.

5.5.3 Sub theme 3 Pre-Event Buzz Builds Anticipation

Participants also described the buildup to the event that created excitement for them. The pre-event excitement made the event feel more exclusive and enabled participants to commit early and not be left behind.

P3 said *"I saw a lot of videos on Instagram, they had teasers or trailers whatever it's called. It looked like mad fun. There was music and yes of course they were planting and doing the helpful stuff we are actually meant to do but the vibes just looked like something you must attend."*

The flashy videos of pre-event content by the organizers on social media were motivators to attend the cause-based event. The videos gave a perception of the event being fun or worthwhile to P3, making it even more special and enticing to attend. Digital storytelling is a hype builder that is also a subtle way of creating pre-event buzz to ensure that missing such an event would be a regret.

5.5.4 Sub theme 4 Action Over Hesitation

When the interviewees were asked about how they perceived such marketing practices ethically, there were some mixed responses. Although some felt it marketeers are unfair and do so to promote fast sales, others felt that urgency helped them overcome their indecisiveness. Prolonged time to think was a hinderance to quick decision making.

P4 said *"I am 21 years old, and I feel like we should be assertive enough to make decisions based on what we want. I think the low availability of slots did make my decision to attend faster but I don't think it influenced me, in the sense I did want to do it anyway, it was like a booster to decide. If I didn't want to go, the unavailability of it wouldn't affect me at all."*

Instead of seeing urgency as a manipulation tactic, P4 described it to be helpful to make a quicker decision. Limited time or scarcity of experience helped participants quit lingering indecision.

5.5.5 Summary

To summarize, participants did feel more intrigued and compelled to attend related events when there was a presence of urgency or scarcity. Whether it was time limit or availability of slots, pre-event buzz, they were all emotional triggers to make quicker decisions. It is important to note that participants did not feel like the urgency led to stress; rather, they appreciated it to clarify their choice faster. In the next chapter, these responses will be discussed through the lens of the theoretical framework - Self-Determination Theory.

CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to critically interpret the findings of Chapter 4 through the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which helps understand the motivational dynamics that are underlying in participants' experiences with FOMO. By conducting five semi structured interviews with culturally diverse participants residing in Dublin, this research seeks to unpack complex emotional, social and psychological factors that influence FOMO-driven behavior. The findings are discussed through critical interpretations in direct relations with the research questions outlined in Chapter 3.

The findings lay a rich foundation for interpretation when it is observed through the SDT lens. According to SDT, motivation factors are shaped through fulfillment or frustration of three key psychological needs – autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci 2000). In this chapter, each research question will be interpreted by examining how FOMO emerges when these psychological needs are not met, for example, when a participant feels the lack of social belonging it resonates with relatedness, the limited control over their participation resonates with autonomy and the need to maintain their cultural presence online or in person is related to competence.

This chapter proceeds to analyze each research question in detail by comparing the participants' narratives with existing literature in the context of SDT to further clarify the deeper motivation behind their experiences. By doing so, the study aims to put into perspective the findings, enhance the understanding of FOMO for academics with young adults and deriving recommendations for event organizers for campaigns to be thought out in accordance with relevant interpretation obtained from this research. This is done in by categorizing the findings into their the research questions through relevance.

6.1 RQ1- How Do Emotional and Moral Outcomes Influence Participation?

RQ1 seeks perspective on how FOMO interacts with deeper emotional and moral fulfilment influence participation. Emotional and ethical motivations for participation are a step further from just group bonding or social connection with peers, it is the feeling of being morally rewarded, avoiding guilt and seeking an experience with a purpose.

According to SDT, positive motivation must satisfy one or more of the three psychological needs – autonomy, competence and relatedness. Participants' interviews revealed that they began with social pressure or guilt from peers which are examples of controlled regulation. But ultimately, they gained moral or emotional satisfaction that translates toward identified or integrated regulation and extrinsic motivations are now self-endorsed similar to the Superbowl study (Kim, et al, 2020). The following sub sections help understand how emotional and moral outcomes influence participation.

6.1.1 Autonomy and Moral Fulfilment

RQ1 is directly linked with the SDT construct of autonomy. While participants did reference FOMO and guilt-based motivation to participate, their decisions evolved into actions that were aligned with their own personal beliefs. Autonomy in SDT refers to the extent to which individuals experience a connection with their true self. In this case, the moral reasons that were narrated such as, wanting to do good, contribute meaningfully and act in tune with their own beliefs of ethics and personal identity indicates a shift from the controlled regulated motivation to more self-determined and internally driven engagement (Nadeem, 2021).

Furthermore, this shift from controlled to autonomous reflects Ryan and Deci's (2000) concept of internalization continuum. Participants not only experienced external social cues, but eventually, began to internalize the value of their actions with time. When individuals reflect on their roles with the cause, they most likely align to internally commit rather than passively engage (Snelgrove et al, 2013).

6.1.2 Emotional Guilt as a Gateway to Engagement

Emotional guilt is linked with introjected motivation, where behavior is prominently driven by internal pressure such as obligation. Although these drivers enhance participation, they are not completely autonomous as they reflect actions that are undertaken to avoid negative feelings.

To quote participants, they described feeling 'bad' if they missed an opportunity to contribute to something more meaningful. This specific moral discomfort is the main trigger point. In SDT terms, these feelings showcase controlled forms of motivation that initiate action but do not lead to a sustainable bond with the cause. Nonetheless, this step was helpful as a gateway to meaningful engagement, which was clearer to them when they saw the outcome of their actions.

This sparks an interest in cause related events, FOMO marketing leads to guilt-driven participation which in turn may not start with positive emotion but could lead to one, in context with the cause being aligned with their moral identities. Unlike the experiment in (Snelgrove et al, 2013) participants did not lose perseverance despite starting off participation with guilt.

6.1.3 FOMO for Doing Good – Identified Regulation

Instead of seeing FOMO with regards to negative pressure, many participants viewed it as a reminder to engage with something bigger than themselves. P5 says *"I did get my turn though which was such a relief"* which aligns with SDT theory concept of identified regulation, when behavior could have been extrinsically motivated but is consciously valued.

Participants described their experiences to be valuable to them, making them feel socially responsible, this shows how motivation was not just peer pressure but was also needful for their own intrinsic satisfaction. Here, FOMO positions itself as a mirror for self-critiquing and a way to affirm personal beliefs through action (Nolan, 2021).

6.1.4 Emotional Reward After Participation (Intrinsic Satisfaction)

Several participants noted feeling pride, satisfaction and moral fulfilment after participating even though they initially were hesitant to part take. This emotional enhancement is in tune with intrinsic motivation as defined by SDT theory, that is, engaging in an activity out of one's own pleasure or personal moral satisfaction.

While SDT distinguishes intrinsic motivation as being depleted from external rewards or pressure, it understands that positive emotional outcomes can actively enhance ones sense of autonomy (Philip Teng Lin et al. 2022). Participants who expressed that they felt "proud" or "like they made a difference" suggest that actions that were FOMO initiated were already internally accepted which is why it enhanced intrinsic satisfaction.

6.1.5 Controlled to Autonomous Motivation

While the initial decision may be driven by factors such as peer influence or social media visibility rooted in FOMO, participants reported experiencing genuine emotional rewards after participation.

P5's comment "we were a part of donating to a good cause, and that's probably what humans should do" hits identified regulation, that is, participant internalized the value of the cause. Although he initially wasn't very enthusiastic to participate, reflecting on the shared action made him understand the cause to be personally worthwhile. According to SDT, internalization is a crucial form for sustaining behavioral engagement with time and for overall psychological well-being of the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

6.1.6 Critical Reflections

These insights are relevant in regards with social marketing, where behavioral change is the main goal. In conclusion, findings for RQ1 indicate that FOMO can function through a spectrum of motivation, from guilt (interjected regulation) to value conscious (identified regulation) and moral fulfilment (intrinsic motivation). These stages reflect SDT continuum, backing up the point that even externally triggered behavior can transform into deep fulfilling actions if aligned with personal values.

It is observed that participation in cause driven events through FOMO marketing can satisfy the need for autonomy and even extends into competence, not just relatedness. This reframes FOMO, as a social cue with emotional and ethical potential in a non-conventional sense, if ethically used, can support individual well-being and societal good through cause-based events.

6.2 RQ2 – To what extent does social media and social influence dictate to participation?

Peer visibility, social connection and social proof emerged as strong drivers for participation. Through SDT - relatedness, these are factors that align to satisfy the psychological need for social connection. The decision to participate in cause-driven events was due to the cause but also had a huge emphasis on maintaining or enhancing social connections. The following sections examine findings in relation to SDT's concept of relatedness.

6.2.1 Relatedness and Social Connection as Motivators

SDT identifies relatedness as one of its three basic psychological needs, alongside autonomy and competence, that are essential for motivation and mental well-being of individuals. Relatedness refers to the basic human desire to connect, interact with other humans and experience giving and receiving care. Participants expressed their desire to want shared

experiences with friends, take part for the sake of the group, to have a sense of belonging which directly aligns with this concept (Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Soenens, 2020).

P3s reasoning "*we had to travel together and that felt like an opportunity to have a fun adventure*" shows the need for shared experience as a method to bond and connect with other individuals showcasing social influence. Similarly, P1s comment "I'm glad I met them and got to interact with them" highlights the deepened relatedness that can be established from participating in such events. His surprise and joy at being able to interact with strangers in a positive and meaningful way indicates the event's success in satisfying the need for social connectedness that exceeded his own expectations.

These example are a clear indication to RQ2 displaying social influence directly relating to participation.

6.2.2 Peer Influence and Introjected Regulation

Peer influence as a driver also showcases a specific motivational mechanism that is identified by SDT – introjected regulation. This means behaviors that are performed to avoid guilt, social anxiety or to get validation from other individuals without complete internal endorsement (Deci & Ryan 2008). For example, P2's narrative of "*All my friends were going to go and if I didn't, it would be weird..*" reflects the need to maintain social ties. Through SDT, this behavior is interpreted as extrinsically motivated with relatedness and competence. Her participation was more of peer influence than a way to express her personal values (Solaiman & Pangaribuan, 2024).

Despite both being controlled motivation, introjected regulation is different from external regulation. For introjected regulation, motivation is internalized and results in an internal pressure to act that is associated with stress, guilt or ego. In this example, participants did act for the sake of feeling accepted and avoid alienation, not by truly embracing the cause's values. This difference is crucial because Deci and Ryan (2008) argue that controlled motivations are less likely to result in long term engagement and wellbeing compared to more independent forms of motivation.

6.2.3 Visibility, Social Media and Digital Relatedness

Another facet of relatedness (SDT) was revealed in visibility and social media, that is, the representation of belonging in the digital space. According to JIM Study (2023), young people

are online for approximately 3.7 hours every day, with WhatsApp (94%), Instagram (62%), TikTok (59%) and Snapchat (49%) being the most popular. In today's world, specifically with young adults, social media serves as a mirror to self-evaluate and compare where they stand with their peers. P1's experience of seeing his primary school friends attend an event that he already knew but decided to join after the Instagram story illustrates the influence of social experiences through digital space.

P4 described her experience as "*if I didn't go then looks like I don't care.*" This statement proves that the role of social proof and identity signaling is very validating in modern participation. She wasn't driven by the concern for waste management alone but by how her presence or absence on social media regarding the event would be interpreted supporting the finding that social media plays a direct role in participation decision for cause related event.

SDT says when relatedness is perceived through fear of social exclusion or non-belonging, individuals take action to restore their stand often through impression management (Ryan & Deci 2008). The visibility that comes with social media thus operates as both a motivator and validator, making sure participants remain socially acceptable to their peers (Wadsley & Ihssen 2021).

6.2.4 Pre-Event Buzz as a Motivational Bridge

Pre-event buzz builds anticipation and is related to both autonomy and competence. Participants spoke about teaser videos as a form of digital storytelling that enhanced their motivation psychologically. The virtual display of the event beforehand is an emotionally rich experience that looks promising socially, aligning this with SDT, intrinsic motivation is strengthened by effective anticipation (Woolley & Fishbach, 2018).

In SDT, emotions that are related to anticipation when positive can enhance internal motivation specifically when the final action is expected to satisfy basic psychological needs. P3's narrative on *"the vibes just looked like something you must attend"* reflects this point. He saw that the event was fun and aligned with what he wanted to be a part of, it made him see value not just because someone forced him but the visual cues triggered his own intrinsic interest.

It is evident that digital marketing is now a motivational factor for the young generation (Masfer & Helmi, 2025). Pre-event buzz fosters expectations of the day making it a digital influence that impacts participation.

6.2.5 Critical Reflections

From an ethical standpoint, the use of FOMO and peer-based and social media visibility pressure for the purpose of driving participation may be criticized as concerning. SDT warns that when people are continually placed in environments where there is external pressure for them to act in accordance with what the majority perceives as the "right action" can lead to emotional burnout (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

In summary, findings related to RQ2 display the power of relatedness and competence as a strong psychological drivers for participation in cause-related events. Through the influence of peers and digital media validation participants reflect the dynamic interplay between social factors and internal motivation to participate. SDT serves as a useful lens to understand these patterns and thus reminding us that although it can drive participation, only when these experiences are internalized personally do these experiences contribute to lasting engagement and individual well-being (Botte, Bakkes & Veltkamp, 2020).

6.3 RQ3 How do Urgency and Scarcity Influence Participation Decision?

Findings for RQ3 showcased how limited availability and time sensitive processes are strong factors in cause driven events participation. By examining this through SDT lens these factors prove to have a nuanced psychological effect, they relate more to competence and autonomy in SDT perspective. They served as external cues that impacted internal decision making, leading participants to become more decisive and effective toward their personal beliefs.

6.3.1 Urgency as a Catalyst for Autonomy

Urgency can be perceived as the opposite of autonomy. Autonomy is the feeling of acting in accordance with an individual's personal values with full control of themselves, a concept that is fundamental for mental well-being (Steckermeier, 2021). However, from the findings it is analyzed that urgency, can act as a motivator to push people towards quick decision making that they were subconsciously already inclined to.

P2's quote on *"we have space for 4 more people to register in 10 minutes"* denotes the moment her need to go for her beliefs took a stronger standing for action. While this may seem like an

extrinsic push, her relief and response to participation reveals that she was already leaning towards taking part. From an SDT perspective this would be an example of a supportive nudge. Urgency may act as an enabler for autonomy if it helps the individual decide in tune with their values and intuition (Del Popolo Cristaldi, et al 2024).

Moreover, when urgency is framed as a part of an event that already aligns with personal beliefs, it does not compromise autonomy which is a big factor in this study on cause-based events. It thus enhances the individuals' own thoughts of being helpful and committing to actions that lead to the wellness of their own personas and the community thus influencing participation in retrospect with RQ3.

6.3.2 Scarcity and Social Relevance Enhancing Competence

Traditionally scarcity in marketing is a perception of limited availability, however, participants viewed limited time slots as evidence in value and an opportunity for their own personal relevance amongst their peers and their own perception of who they are (Hamilton & Hossany 2023).

The need to feel effective, successful and impactful is important to consider through the SDT lens. For example, when P4 felt that the limited number of registration spots "validated" the importance of the event and triggered immediate action it suggests a psychological reward, that is, the act of securing a slot made her feel selected, competent and proactive in society. The success of 'getting through' before a deadline can create a sense of achievement that is psychologically rewarding.

Competency in this context is not in relation to performing tasks skillfully but rather is about navigating the situation efficiently (Spieler 2024). Making a quick decision and ensuring their spot is an act in time that participants feel happier and capable of having been successful within the parameters of what the event has to offer in terms of structure making urgency an impactful trait in participation.

6.3.3 Action Over Hesitation

Another powerful insight from participants' narratives was how urgency helped overcome participants' dilemma and hesitation. Urgency enhanced clarity and helped them figure out what they wanted by quickly resolving the initial doubts they had (Ferrucci, Genovesio &

Marcos 2021). In SDT context, an obstacle to autonomous motivation is dilemma and decision paralysis which was overturned through urgency.

P4 states *"I don't think it influenced me; it was like a booster"* shows the dynamic nature of urgency being a motivator. The external pressure lends a helping hand to stop second guessing and make a solid commitment. A combination of urgency with intention that is previously present creates momentum.

Through SDT, this shows how even urgency can make a decision that was autonomous in nature by closing the mental loop the participants go through with time and directing themselves to their chosen goal faster. This perspective changes previous criticisms of urgency and scarcity to be tactics in marketing (Zamfir, 2024).

6.4.5 Critical Reflections

Findings for RQ3 suggest that scarcity and urgency can support, in certain contexts, than undermine autonomy. Urgency did not reduce self-decisions in this study rather gave them clarity toward the decision they were already leaning towards. Similarly, scarcity also allowed participants to feel more effective and decisive.

This side of the coin showcases how FOMO driven marketing does not always have to operate through pressure or fear or other negative factors. Specifically in cause driven events it can be a stepping stone to meaningful engagement and provide participants with perspective on themselves and their affiliation with their society. These findings indicate that motivation can be a spectrum of many actions, it combines elements from external cues but relies mostly on internal reasoning (Kim, Lee & Kim 2020).

6.5 Theoretical Contribution

6.5.1 Extending SDTs Relatedness to Digital Space

Participation was a result of controlled motivation or introjected regulation which in the long run may not form internalized satisfaction unless it aligns with the individuals personal morals. This research extends on Ryan and Deci's (2000) study demonstrating that even in cause based events, controlled regulation is common but long term motivation occurs only when morals are aligned.

Participants were not just passive recipients of peer influence; rather they used these events to cultivate opportunities to create meaningful experiences with others. These perspectives reinforce SDTs' notion that the social environment plays a crucial role in fostering essential motivational needs (Ward, et al 2010).

Digital influence in this study is an example of SDT's claim that online social environments can directly influence viewers' psychological need for satisfaction. Although studies on need for relatedness are conclusive for offline interactions as being essential (Reis et al., 2000), it is not confined by face-to-face interaction. It can also be experienced through the digital space by viewing other people's lives online, experiencing a sense of belonging to a part of the online community, by gaining approval from likes and comments. This displays proof beyond prior studies on SDT that relatedness construct beyond physical interactions aligning with online social environments (Sheldon et al., 2011)

6.5.2 Reframing FOMO as a Gateway to Autonomous Motivation

Participation in cause driven events has the power to shift participants from extrinsically motivated FOMO driven behavior toward a more meaningful self-endorsed participation, a distinction for ethical marketing and engagement design. This research reframes FOMO traditionally seen as an opposition to autonomy, as a potential facilitator for moral identity when values are shared between the cause and the participant (Kim, Lee & Kim 2020). This fills the gap in literature of exploring moral and ethical dimensions on FOMO marketing in cause based events.

Through the SDT lens, extrinsic motivators have the potential to evolve into internalized, self-determined motivation if they align with the individuals' personal beliefs. This shows the motivational journey participants go through is complex in cause related participation context, specifically when FOMO is a factor. The transformation from external motivation to internalized need to engage suggests that FOMO, in the traditional sense seen as a trigger point, can serve toward a gateway for a value-based decision-making pathway. It shifts FOMO from a threat to autonomy toward a value-aligned motivator (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Emotional guilt is an extrinsic motivator but it has the potential to evolve into internalized moral fulfilment when the cause begins to resonate with the participants' beliefs and values. Emotions of moral fulfilment were felt during participation which implies the psychological impact of participation is not linear. Non-linear progression supports internalized continuum

(Ryan & Deci, 2017) but adds variation of initial negative effect (guilt) transformed to intrinsic satisfaction in the context of prosocial events.

6.5.3 Ethical Applications of Urgency and Scarcity

Urgency can also support identified regulation, a state where an external motivator aligns with individual goals respecting a sense of ownership for their own personal decisions. In SDT terms, scarcity works as providing feedback that strengthens the individuals sense of making it past the cutoff point. This study shows that SDTs application extends to urgency and scarcity in prosocial contexts can enhance competence and autonomy countering existing academic literature that suggest these tactics to be a controlling mechanism (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010)

This introduces a new perspective that such tactics can support psychological needs for satisfaction when applied in the right context adding a layer of complexity to SDT application in marketing.

Collective, these contributions gives insight to SDT in a new perspective by extending its application into cause based events showing transformation from external triggers to autonomous motivation.

6.6 Academic Recap

Addressing the research questions directly, RQ1 findings show that FOMO can transition from controlled, guilt based or peer pressure based participation toward autonomous, valued engagement that participants receive genuine emotional and moral satisfaction. RQ2 findings suggest that social media and visibility is directly linked to SDT need for relatedness, thereby impacting participation as cause based events through SDT lens are shared identity experiences. RQ3 findings uncover that urgency and scarcity when put in the right context can deliver intrinsic satisfaction. However, there is a balance to be met by focusing on how the messages are told rather than on how they are taken. Collectively, these insights finds FOMO to have a major impact on cause based event participation. Much like everything else, there is duality to FOMO and it can be harnessed to impact consumers for their and social betterment.

6.7 Practical Implications

This study raises important suggestions for event organizers and marketers. While using social proof and group dynamics thinking can be effective, these strategies should be designed to nurture autonomous motivation that allow participants to make informed decisions rather than provoking them to make hasty choices out of the fear of exclusion. For example, instead of framing not attending as a loss, it could be framed as joining a new community for the betterment of society (Kaptein & Eckles, 2012).

For ethical marketing it is crucial to ensure that external cues such as urgency and scarcity are used in ways to support psychological needs for the individual to grow and fulfill their own full potential. Findings suggests that urgency and scarcity can support autonomous motivation, thus, event organizers can use this to primarily display an opportunity to join a valued community rather than showing limited availability as a threat.

Additionally, digital marketing should mandatorily comprise of SDT principles to ensure online engagement enhances relatedness and competence. Pre event buzz could potentially include testimonials of previous participants to inform consumers about the value that they get to add through engagement (Sheldon et al., 2011). This transforms FOMO from a fear-based driver to a value-based motivator.

Furthermore, the findings highlight how initial emotions can transform with engagement, therefore, it is important that organizers showcase the collective good done during the event. For example, announcing money raised for a charity through a fundraiser, number of people that can be helped with the amount of blood donated in donation camps. This feedback can sustain intrinsic motivation and can encourage long term loyalty (Lovoll et al, 2017).

6.8 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study is important in understanding the effects of FOMO marketing, it has its limitations. The sample size is concise which limits its generalization and restricts the influence of broader demography and cultural variation that may influence motivation (Bryman, 2016). Semi structed interviews could potentially lead to social desirability bias where the answers were formalized or coerced in regards to judgement (Fisher & Katz, 2000).

Qualitative research has the benefit of truly diving into detailed narratives and explicitly unfolding lived experiences. However it lacks statistical comparisons between motivational

categories (Lim, 2024). Moreover, cross sectional study is a snapshot in time from memory and cannot capture the complete life cycle of participation.

Future research can be extended to longitudinal studies to track whether introjected motivation would transform into autonomous motivation over time. Such studies would help explore the persistence of SDT motivators in prosocial contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2017). By using larger and a much more diverse sample sizes, future literature could be used for a wider range in perspective.

Additionally, mixed method studies could further compare different FOMO marketing strategies, such as guilt-based, messaging, value-based messaging in triggering long lasting engagement. Diving into the digital world for FOMO marketing separately would also potentially lead to identifying differences in offline and online FOMO triggers, Future literature could also explore ethical boundaries of urgency and scarcity by examining conditions under which autonomy in participation is enhanced rather than undermined.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

This research examines how FOMO marketing influences participation in cause based events by using Self Determination Theory as its guiding framework. By conducting five semi structured interviews of young adults from various culture residing in Dublin, the study explores the interaction between emotional, social and psychological drivers through SDTs relatedness, autonomy and competence and how this shaped their decisions to participate.

The findings reveal that FOMO is not solely an anxiety inducing factor, it can contribute to self-endorsed motivation when aligned with the right values, proving FOMO to be a layered psychological phenomenon. Initially participants' motivation was through controlled regulation such as peer pressure, social proof and emotional guilt but later transformed toward identified regulation and because of the context of prosocial events, was developed into intrinsic satisfaction.

Reframing traditional literature on FOMO marketing traits such as urgency, scarcity and social influence to be capable of enhancing psychological needs rather than undermine them in cause based events provided the cause aligns with the individuals own personal beliefs and their existing intensions. The study also extends SDT application through digital media, where online interactions have potential to fulfill the same psychological needs required through physical interactions.

From a practicality perspective, this research suggests marketers and event organizers to use FOMO by designing campaigns that balance motivational nudges and informed choices that are not compelled by fear of exclusion. This also contributes to long term engagement than short term hype. The ethical implications are clear, when FOMO is used thoughtfully, it can move beyond being a driver for impulsive action to a motivator for autonomous participation and engagement.

Similar to all qualitative research, it comes with certain limitations such as small, non-representative sample and desirability bias. However, it offers rich narratives and opens a new perspective on detailed research for FOMO marketing and its impact on cause based events. Future research much explore longitudinal studies on whether controlled motivation transforms to autonomous motivation, offline and online comparison of FOMO and its impact, and examine cross cultural differences on how FOMO is experienced.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to both theory and practice by branding FOMO as a complex motivational force that is capable of fostering ethical and prosocial engagement in social marketing. By basing these insights through SDT framework, it provides a strong foundation toward a responsible, effective and psychologically positive approach to social cause based marketing.

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APPENDIX 1 – ETHICS FORM

National College of Ireland

Human Participants Ethical Review Application Form

All parts of the below form must be completed. However in certain cases where sections are not relevant to the proposed study, clearly mark NA in the box provided.

Part A: Title of Project and Contact Information

Name

Shilpa Raji Jacob

Student Number (if applicable)

23354747

Email

x23354747@student.ncirl.ie

Status:

Undergraduate ☐
Postgraduate ✓
Staff ☐

Supervisor (if applicable)

Dr.Louise Maguire

Title of Research Project

The Impact of FOMO on Cause Based Event Participation – Self Determination Theory Perspective

Category into which the proposed research falls (see guidelines)

Research Category A ✓
Research Category B ☐
Research Category C ☐

Have you read the NCI Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants?

Yes ✓
No ☐

Please indicate any other ethical guidelines or codes of conduct you have consulted

NA

Has this research been submitted to any other research ethics committee?

Yes ☐
No ✓

If yes please provide details, and the outcomes of this process, if applicable:

Is this research supported by any form of research funding?

Yes ☐
No ✓

If yes please provide details, and indicate whether any restrictions exist on the freedom of the researcher to publish the results:

APPENDIX 2- CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

**THE IMPACT OF FOMO ON CAUSE-BASED EVENT PARTICIPATION:
SELF DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

Consent to take part in research

- I _____voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves taking part in an interview where I will be asked questions about my thinking, experience and attitude regarding cause driven event that I participated in. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes long.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in my dissertation, other academic publications, NCI library publication, and other academic presentations if need be with or without my approval.

- I understand that my audio recordings will be retained by the researcher. This material will be kept only till until the dissertation results are finalized.

- I understand transcripts with all identifying information redacted may be added to the dissertation.

- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher to seek clarification or any information regarding the research.

Name of participant _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Name of Researcher Shilpa Raji Jacob

Degree Masters in Marketing

College/University Affiliated NCI – National College of Ireland

Contact Details x23354747@student.ncirl.ie

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 3 – DEBRIEFING SHEET

DEBRIEFING SHEET

Researcher: Shilpa Raji Jacob

College/University: Student at NCI college, Dublin, Ireland

Level: 9 - Masters Student

Course: Marketing

Title: Impact of FOMO on Cause Based Event Participation – Self Determination Theory Perspective

Purpose of Study: Thank you for taking part in this research. This study examines how FOMO marketing influence participation in prosocial or cause based events such as charity runs, blood donation camps and other communally beneficial activities.

It aims to understand the perspective of participants that shape their decision making to engage with such events for academic literature and campaign design for marketeers and event organizers

What Happens With Your Data: All information will remain confidential. Your data will be used to observe, analyze and discuss findings for my research aim. Any inclusion of your data will be anonymous.

Your Right: You can withdraw your data within one week of your interview date by contacting me through the email provided on the consent form. You can also contact me for queries regarding this thesis.

Thank You, your contributions are valuable and greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX 4 – INFORMATION LETTER

INFORMATION LETTER

Thesis Title – Impact of FOMO on Cause Based Event Participation – Self Determination Theory Perspective

You have been invited to participate in a small interview that will be between 30-45 minutes long for my final dissertation project. Before you start the interview you need to know a little about what my study is so this is a letter of information to provide you with a short overview. If there is any queries regarding this study please don't hesitate to ask.

My name is Shilpa Raji Jacob, I am a Masters student in Marketing at NCI, Dublin. My study is about FOMO marketing and its impact on cause based event participation. FOMO marketing is a tactical move in marketing where the psychological phenomenon of missing out is used to sell products or services. It aims to create a sense of urgency and scarcity around the product/service giving it an exciting feel.

Cause based events are events that have a societal benefit attached to it. With regard to your answers being biased I will not be disclosing what my studies implications are yet. But it aims to showcase the impact FOMO has on young people to participate in prosocial events.

You will be asked questions about your experience when you participated in a cause based event. You are encouraged to speak from what you recall and provide me with details of your emotions before, during and after participation for clarity on data.

All your responses will be recorded with your permission and everything that is used in my research will redact your name and respect your anonymity.

Shilpa Raji Jacob

Msc.Marketing Student

X23354747@student.ncirl.ie

APPENDIX 5 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTORY

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (e.g age, gender etc)
2. Can you tell me a cause related event you participated in? What was it and how did you first hear about it?
3. What initially drew your attention to the event before you decided to participate?

Social Connection and Peer Influence

4. How, if at all, did the involvement of your friends, colleagues or other peers affect your decision to participate?
5. In what ways did social media stories, posts impact your interest to the event you participated in?
6. How did participation affect your sense of belonging in the community? Through both physical presence in the event and sharing it online (if it was shared)

FOMO and Moral Fulfilment

7. Did you experience the feeling of missing out before you decided to attend? If yes, How? Why?
8. How, if at all, did the idea of contributing toward the cause make you feel before and after participation in the cause based event?
9. Can you share a few moments in the event that stands out to you associated with the emotions you felt at the time?

Urgency and Scarcity

10. Was there any sense of urgency or limited availability for the event that you were aware of?
11. What were the emotions you felt before the event after knowing you were participating?
12. What did you expect the event to be like and why?

Ethical Views

13. How do you feel about marketing tactics like urgency and scarcity used in prosocial events?

14. Why or why not?

15. Is there anything else relevant to this research that you would like to contribute?