THE IMPACT OF FEAR OF MISSING OUT ON UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT INTENTION IN VIETNAM

MSc. Pham Thi Van* - MSc. Tran Thu Trang**

Abstract: ***This study investigates the impact of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on university enrollment intention among high school students in Vietnam. Based on survey data collected from 335 grade 12 students in Vietnam and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings reveal that FOMO significantly influences enrollment intention through emotional anticipation mechanisms, particularly anticipated happiness. While FOMO positively affects both anticipated regret and anticipated happiness, only anticipated happiness was found to exert a significant influence on enrollment intention. The study contributes to extending consumer behavior theory in the higher education context and provides practical implications for universities in developing more effective enrollment communication strategies in digital environments.***

• Keywords: *fear of missing out, FOMO, enrollment intention, high school students.*

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1. Introduction

In the context of rapid digital transformation, social media and online platforms have become increasingly important in students' information-searching and decision-making processes (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are no longer used solely for entertainment purposes but have also become important channels for accessing information related to university admissions, institutional branding, and student life (Rutter et al., 2016). Previous studies indicate that students increasingly rely on digital platforms when searching for university-related information (Li et al., 2025) and are significantly influenced by online content during the enrollment intention-making process (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011). Recent studies in Vietnam also suggest that digital communication and social media have become important determinants influencing students' perceptions and enrollment intention in higher education contexts (Nhu, 2022).

In this context, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as an increasingly important psychological phenomenon (Good & Hyman, 2020). FOMO refers to the anxiety individuals experience when they believe that others may be enjoying rewarding experiences or valuable opportunities that they are missing (Przybylski et al., 2013). For high school students preparing for university enrollment, frequent exposure to university-related content, campus tours, student activities, rankings, academic achievements, and positive experiences shared on social media may increase concerns about missing attractive educational opportunities (Alt, 2015). This issue becomes particularly important as educational decisions are increasingly shaped by online environments and digital social signals.

University enrollment is considered one of the most important decisions influencing students' future academic and career development. During this process, students are influenced not only by academic considerations but also by emotional expectations, social influence, and communication-related factors (Chapman, 1981). Previous studies on decision-making behavior suggest that anticipated regret and anticipated happiness may significantly influence behavioral intention in high-risk or high-commitment decisions (Briggs, 2006). In the university enrollment context, students may experience concerns about missing universities that receive strong public attention or develop positive emotional expectations regarding institutions with attractive digital images and reputations. Although FOMO has been widely examined in areas such as consumer behavior, financial investment, and social media usage, research investigating FOMO in higher education contexts remains relatively limited, particularly in developing countries such as Vietnam (Hưng, 2025). However, the role of FOMO and emotional anticipation mechanisms, including anticipated regret and anticipated happiness, has not been sufficiently examined in students' university enrollment intention.

Addressing this research gap, this study investigates the impact of FOMO on university enrollment intention among high school students in Vietnam. The study also examines the mediating roles of anticipated regret and anticipated happiness in the relationship between FOMO and enrollment intention. Through this approach, the study contributes to extending the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in

** FPT University, Hanoi; email: vanpt19@fe.edu.vn*
*** Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Hanoi; email: trang.tranthu@hust.edu.vn*

higher education while providing practical implications for universities in developing enrollment communication strategies suitable for students in digital communication environments.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1. Literature Review

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has been examined across various research fields. Psychological studies define FOMO as anxiety arising from the perception that others may be having rewarding experiences or opportunities that one is missing (Dhir et al., 2018). In digital communication contexts, FOMO is considered an important driver of social media usage and significantly influences users' emotions and decision-making behavior (Fu et al., 2020). Recent studies also indicate that FOMO may influence consumer behavior, investment decisions, and personal choices through social comparison and psychological pressure mechanisms (Ân, 2026).

In higher education contexts, university enrollment intentions are considered complex processes influenced by multiple factors such as institutional image, enrollment communication, social media, and social expectations. In Vietnam, recent studies indicate that students are increasingly influenced by online environments and digital communication content during university enrollment processes. However, existing studies mainly focus on university brand image, training quality, or social media influence, while the role of FOMO and emotional anticipation mechanisms remains underexplored.

2.2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.2.1. FOMO, Anticipated Regret, and Enrollment Intention

Anticipated regret refers to negative emotions arising when individuals imagine regretting future decisions due to inappropriate choices or missed opportunities (Zeelenberg, 1999). In university enrollment contexts, students may worry that they will regret not choosing universities that receive strong public attention or possess positive digital reputations. Good and Hyman (2020) argue that FOMO may intensify concerns about missing opportunities, thereby influencing future-oriented decision-making behavior. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: FOMO positively affects anticipated regret.

H4: Anticipated regret positively affects enrollment intention.

2.2.2. FOMO, Anticipated Happiness, and Enrollment Intention

Anticipated happiness reflects individuals' expectations regarding positive future emotions. In university enrollment contexts, students may imagine feelings of pride, happiness, or social recognition if they become students at highly regarded universities (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001). The studies suggest that attractive opportunities may increase individuals' positive emotional expectations. In addition, Good and Hyman (2021) indicate that FOMO may amplify these expectations through social comparison processes. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: FOMO positively affects anticipated happiness.
H5: Anticipated happiness positively affects enrollment intention.

2.2.3. FOMO and Enrollment Intention

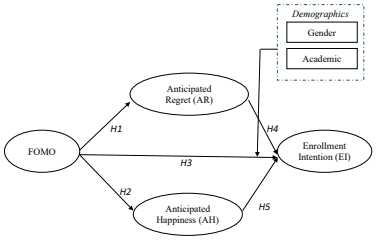
FOMO is considered a psychological state driven by concerns about missing valuable opportunities or experiences enjoyed by others (Przybylski et al., 2013). In social media environments, continuous exposure to university-related content, campus tours, student activities, and academic achievements may create psychological pressure and encourage students to make enrollment intention more quickly. Good and Hyman (2020) argue that FOMO may influence decision-making behavior through social pressure and the need for social belonging. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: FOMO positively affects enrollment intention.

2.3. Proposed Research Model

The proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed Research Model



Source: Developed by the authors based on previous studies.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of FOMO on university enrollment intention among high school students in Vietnam. Data were collected through an online survey using a structured questionnaire distributed to grade 12 students. The study adopted a non-probability convenience sampling method due to the accessibility and availability of respondents during the university enrollment period. The target respondents were grade 12 students who were currently searching for university-related information and preparing for university enrollment intention.

The survey was conducted from March 2026 to June 2026. After data screening and cleaning, a total of 335 valid responses were retained for analysis. The questionnaire consisted of measurement items related to five main constructs, including Fear of Missing Out -

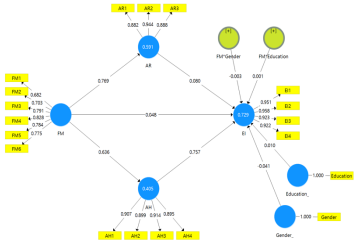
FOMO, Anticipated Regret - AR, Anticipated Happiness - AH, and Enrollment Intention - EI. All measurement items were adapted from previous studies and adjusted to fit the higher education context in Vietnam. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree") was used to measure all variables.

3.2. Data Analysis

The study applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among the proposed constructs. PLS-SEM was considered appropriate because the study aimed to predict behavioral intention and examine mediation relationships between psychological constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was evaluated through reliability and validity assessments, including Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), factor loadings, and discriminant validity.

The structural model was then assessed using path coefficients, bootstrapping procedures, coefficients of determination (R^2), and indirect effects. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to examine the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. The significance of the path coefficients was evaluated using t-values and p-values.

Figure 1. Research model of the study



Source: Developed by the authors using SmartPLS 3.0.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

The PLS-SEM measurement model was evaluated based on reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity criteria. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with the recommended threshold of 0.70. Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al. (2016), AVE values should exceed 0.50 to ensure convergent validity. The results in Table 1 indicate that all constructs satisfied the convergent validity requirement, with most factor loadings exceeding 0.70. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). The results confirmed acceptable discriminant validity among all constructs. In addition, multicollinearity was examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5, indicating the absence of multicollinearity issues in the model.

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Composite Reliability
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	FOMO1	0.682	0.845	0.559	0.882
	FOMO2	0.703			
	FOMO3	0.791			
	FOMO4	0.828			
	FOMO5	0.784			
	FOMO6	0.775			
Anticipated Regret (AR)	AR1	0.882	0.896	0.827	0.935
	AR2	0.944			
	AR3	0.888			
Anticipated Happiness (AH)	AH1	0.907	0.932	0.829	0.951
	AH2	0.899			
	AH3	0.914			
	AH4	0.895			
Enrollment Intention (EI)	EI1	0.951	0.958	0.887	0.969
	EI2	0.958			
	EI3	0.923			
	EI4	0.922			

Source: Authors' calculation based on SmartPLS 3.0 output.

The structural model was further evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2). The adjusted R^2 values for AR, AH, and EI were 0.591, 0.405, and 0.729, respectively. These results indicate that the independent and mediating variables explained 72.9% of the variance in EI.

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

The structural relationships were examined using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 3.0. The results are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that FOMO positively affects AR ($\beta = 0.769$, $p < 0.001$) and AH ($\beta = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the direct relationship between FOMO and EI was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.048$, $p > 0.05$). Regarding the mediating variables, AH positively affected EI ($\beta = 0.757$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the relationship between AR and EI was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.080$, $p > 0.05$). The indirect effects analysis revealed that the indirect relationship between FOMO and EI through AH was statistically significant, while the indirect effect through AR was not significant.

Table 2. Structural Model and Indirect Effects Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	FOMO → AR	0.769	27.209	0.000	Supported
H2	FOMO → AH	0.636	14.416	0.000	Supported
H3	FOMO → EI	0.048	0.834	0.404	Not supported
H4	AR → EI	0.080	0.980	0.327	Not supported
H5	AH → EI	0.757	11.965	0.000	Supported
	FOMO → AR → EI	0.061	–	–	Not significant
	FOMO → AH → EI	0.481	–	–	Significant

Source: Authors' calculation based on SmartPLS 3.0 output.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying Enrollment Intention - EI among high school students in Vietnam. The results indicate that Fear of Missing Out - FOMO significantly influences students' emotional anticipation, particularly Anticipated Regret - AR and Anticipated Happiness - AH. However, the effect of FOMO on EI occurs primarily through indirect emotional mechanisms rather than through direct influence.

First, the findings confirm that FOMO positively affects AR. Students with higher levels of FOMO are more likely to experience concerns about missing valuable educational opportunities or making in appropriate

enrollment decisions. This result supports the argument of Przybylski et al. (2013), who suggest that FOMO is closely associated with anxiety regarding missed opportunities in socially connected environments. In higher education contexts, continuous exposure to university-related content on digital platforms may intensify students' awareness of educational competition and future uncertainty.

However, AR did not significantly affect EI. This finding suggests that negative emotional anticipation alone may not be sufficient to directly shape students' enrollment decisions. Compared with contexts such as financial investment or impulsive consumption, where fear-related emotions often influence behavioral intention, university enrollment decisions appear to be influenced differently. Students may recognize the possibility of future regret without necessarily translating that concern into actual enrollment intention.

Second, the findings reveal that FOMO positively affects AH. Students with higher levels of FOMO tend to develop stronger positive expectations regarding university life and future self-development. This result is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the important role of emotional anticipation in future-oriented decision-making behavior (Prince & Davies, 2001). In digital communication environments, social media platforms not only provide information about universities but also shape symbolic representations of academic achievement, student identity, social belonging, and future opportunities. Consequently, students may form stronger positive expectations toward higher education experiences before making enrollment decisions.

More importantly, AH was found to be the strongest predictor of EI. This finding indicates that students are more likely to develop enrollment intention when they anticipate positive educational experiences, personal growth, and social belonging. The result reflects the increasingly emotional and experience-oriented nature of higher education decision-making in digital environments. It also suggests that emotional anticipation may play a more important role than fear-related emotions in shaping educational decisions.

Another important finding is that the direct relationship between FOMO and EI was not statistically significant. Instead, FOMO indirectly influences EI through AH. This indirect-only mediation pattern contributes to extending FOMO-related research into the higher education context and provides additional evidence regarding the psychological mechanisms underlying educational decision-making. The finding suggests that students are not directly driven by FOMO itself, but rather by the positive expectations formed during the university information-searching process in digital environments.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of FOMO theory to the higher education context and highlights the important role of emotional anticipation in shaping EI. The findings contribute to the growing literature on consumer behavior and educational decision-making by demonstrating that emotional expectations may exert stronger influences on enrollment behavior than regret-related emotions.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that higher education institutions should pay greater attention to the emotional dimensions of enrollment communication strategies. University communication activities should not only focus on academic information or institutional achievements but also emphasize the development of positive expectations regarding future educational experiences. In digital communication environments, communication strategies capable of strengthening emotional engagement and psychological connection may become increasingly important in influencing students' EI.

Despite its contributions, this study was conducted within a specific educational context in Vietnam and primarily focused on psychological mechanisms associated with FOMO. Future studies may extend the research model by incorporating additional communication-related or behavioral variables across different educational contexts.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that FOMO influences EI primarily through emotional anticipation mechanisms, particularly AH, rather than through direct effects or regret-related emotions. The findings contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications related to student enrollment behavior in digital communication environments.

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