

You could be suffering from FoMO this Christmas

December 15 2015, by Luke Butcher



Credit: Monstera Production from Pexels

The holiday season can be a traumatising time for many people, but spare a thought (or retweet) for those who strive to be a part of the cultural zeitgeist at the expense of all sanity and reason.

For these individuals, fear can be an incapacitating emotion caused not by spiders (arachnophobia), the colour white (leukophobia), or a fear of the numbers 666 (hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia), but rather a [fear](#) of missing out (FoMO).

Scholars consider [FoMO](#) a pervasive apprehension that one is absent for the rewarding experiences of others, and is characterised by a desire for [continual connection](#) with what others are doing.

For many people, it's even harder to avoid social media than it is to avoid spiders, white or the devil's number. And evidently these poor individuals are particularly vulnerable when Santa makes his annual pilgrimage to town, which boosts the Australian retail market to the tune of [A\\$46.8 billion](#).

Double rewards

Social media has infiltrated the daily lives of many people. Currently in Australia, 24% of users check social media more than [five times a day](#), of which 70% happens through smartphones, 93% going to the demographically diverse Facebook, 26% to Instagram, 28% to LinkedIn and 17% to Twitter.

It's not surprising that marketers are cashing in, so much so that the average Australian over the age of 16 is now expected to spend around [A\\$2,500 in retail](#) in the six weeks leading up to Christmas.

And at least some of this spending is fuelled by a desire to fit in and tell everyone about it on social media. Evidently, the intrinsic value of giving a great gift and bringing joy to a loved one is out-weighed by trivial extrinsic motivations of [likes](#), [shares](#) and [re-grams](#).

In looking for a possible explanation, lets get [phenomenological](#) and

consider a few scenarios that will typify the connection between Christmas marketing and FoMO.

It's early August and a day after your partner's birthday. No sooner has she finished scanning copies of the receipts of all the presents she's going to return, she has already shared with you 12 carefully curated [Pinterest](#) boards of iPhone-filtered photos and inspiring infographics filled with French Bulldogs, hanging gardens, super-food smoothies and cute-ique travel destinations. All just in time for Christmas.

We know that some individuals are [deeply concerned](#) with how others view them on social media, and are careful with the content they share with their world. This may explain the social media-friendly present options, but it doesn't go far to telling us why a celebrity cookbook is even thing. Or does it?

Like many teenagers, Johnny opens up his last present under the tree. His parents watched their [RSS feed](#) with bated breath all of November, stumbling across a blog article covering "26 Greatest Presents for Teens".

While they did expect to click through 26 inane images with snappy hyperlinked taglines, they could never have anticipated that the joy Johnny will receive from using his new Bluetooth-controlled Quadcopter is no match for the 50 likes he will get for his Instagram post posing with the new pressie.

Our friend social media

Recent research suggests that individuals use social media purposefully, for reasons such as [presenting themselves](#) in ways that gain social capital, and that those who exhibit higher traits of FoMO have an ["unhealthy" relationship](#) with social media. In Johnny's case, it's hard to disagree.

At its core, social media reinforces connections within networks while [strengthening communication](#) among friends and family members.

While this might explain the reasoning behind Johnny's LinkedIn endorsement for "Mother" – a symbol of ultimate gratitude to his mum – sometimes Christmas can bring out the strongest of fears.

As you open up an awkward Christmas present and pose for the obligatory family photo with bonbon-extracted paper crowns, uploaded straight to your aunt's Facebook of course, perhaps your FoMO becomes a *favour* of missing out.

In this sense, some believe social media serves as a means for users' [emotional support](#). Considering the inevitable ["digitally fuelled deluge of updates"](#) symptomatic of Christmas-marketing induced FoMO, perhaps we should all stuff our stockings with some [social media](#) support.

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