

# **Fear of Missing out (FOMO) Guerrilla Marketing Strategy: A Case Study of Ed-tech Platform WhiteHat Jr.**

**Case-based Research Paper**

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper follows the journey of educational-technology start-up WhiteHat Jr., a coding platform for children of the age 6-14. This case study explores the reasons behind its expeditious rise, its acquisition to Byju's and its eventual advertisement ban by the Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI). WhiteHat Jr.'s key marketing strategy included evoking a sense of 'missing out' on an event in the mind of the consumer. The start-up quickly managed to create a niche amongst the software professionals and later expanded multi-fold in Indian households. The findings of the case study reveal that this type of marketing pressurizes the average consumer household into enrolling in the program by inducing fear in their mind. The anticipated losses from not enrolling in the program usually are the success of neighbours' children and the lost opportunity that their child wouldn't be the next tech wiz. This paper analyses Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) marketing from a brand's point of view using a case study approach.*

**Keywords:** FOMO marketing, fear-based appeals, brand image, anticipated losses

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Marketing strategies and principles keep evolving every now and then in this day and age of the internet, provided that the brands only get a short window to market their product on social media as opposed to the conventional TV, new forms of marketing have evolved to capture the market. Building a new start-up can be one of the most daunting responsibilities of a young entrepreneur. With the rise of instant gratification internet platforms, it is at times perilous for a young brand to market their product in the presence of vast swathes of prominent corporations, keeping an eye (Gao & Feng; Zhang, Wu, Kang & Sundar, 2014). In order to establish a start-up, an entrepreneur only gets a small window on different webpages and social media to advertise its products (Chung & Austria, 2010). In this day and age, advertisements are omnipresent either overtly or in a hideous form; brands only get a few seconds to display their advertisements convincingly enough for consumers to buy the product or subscribe to the event (Hayran et al., 2016; Suresh & Biswas, 2019). One such guerilla marketing technique that has emerged to capitalize on the sales is FOMO or Fear of Missing out.

**FOMO** or the ‘**Fear of Missing Out**’ can be defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. FOMO is an emotional response aroused by fear, guilt or regret that in turn compels an individual to be in sync with what others are doing (Alt, 2017; Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO emanates from the anticipated regret of missing out on an event or a product. A music concert that an individual couldn't attend, but their peer did, evokes a sense of missing out on experiencing the concert often played in the mind of the individual as a lost opportunity, which best defines the fear of missing out. The advent of the internet has only elevated this fear in the recent decade (Hetz et al., 2015). The popular internet culture sheds FOMO, in intense painful doses, escaping, which is ultimately inevitable (Hunt et al., 2018). FOMO-centric studies, to date, have primarily been undertaken from the psychological perspective, focused on the negative psychological externalities of social media usage (Alt, 2015; Baker et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2016) and its adverse effects on mental health (Hetz et al., 2015; Milyavskaya et al., 2018) of consumers subjected to FOMO.

The 'Fear of Missing Out or FOMO is one such guerrilla marketing strategy that gained traction in the recent past. This marketing strategy is based on eliciting emotions such as fear, guilt and regret in the psyche of a consumer, through advertisements often targeting the internal hesitancy of an individual to buy a product or opt for a service to ultimately drive its purchase likelihood (Good & Hyman, 2020). An example of this is the music streaming application Spotify in its advertisement plays, "Your friends have subscribed to the online fest, have you?" These advertisements aim at increasing the call-to-action of a consumer by inducing a fear of losing out on an opportunity while their peers are not (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2019). FOMO may be induced by FOMO-laden appeals (advertisements) or triggers that could affect imminent experience-related decisions (Hodkinson, 2016). The presence of fear-based marketing appeals can be found in Australia (Hodkinson, 2019), China (Bartikowski et al., 2019), Korea (Kang & Ma, 2020), Netherlands (Zeelenberg et al., 2011) and France (Bartikowski et al., 2019) to name a few. This study on fear-based marketing aims to explore the emergence of this new appeal in marketing and assess its sustainability in the long run (Kang et al., 2019)

The number of fear-based advertisements has quadrupled in the last four to five years. With tough competition in the online advertising industry, young brands have started to shift their focus from conventional marketing strategy to newer and more promising (sales-generating) forms of advertising. The emergence of FOMO has acted as a general equalizer between a young start-up and corporations with deep pockets. The FOMO appeals are commercially feasible and fairly inexpensive. Despite the fact that FOMO is regarded as a settled wonder in mainstream pop-culture society and has been appropriated effectively for business purposes, it has received limited scholarly intrigue.

Today, India is a growing economy with an ever-growing disposable income. The purchasing power and access to the internet of an average Indian consumer are on the rise; this new category of consumers now finds themselves with a multitude of options in front (Meyer & Birdsall, 2012; Suresh & Biswas, 2019). Thus, it becomes necessary that marketers understand all the possible channels through which they can reach their target consumer's psyche and incentivize them to buy their product (Herman, 2000). This study explores the presence of online FOMO based

marketing within the Indian perspective using the example of an educational-tech start-up, WhiteHat Jr.

The impetus for conducting this research emanated from a marketing perspective, that is, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of interrelations between externally initiated fear eliciting FOMO advertising in an online space taking the instance of WhiteHat Jr. The paper strives to study the rise of this guerilla marketing strategy, its prevalence in the Indian context and its long term sustainability, by tracing the journey of the start-up probably uses these interrelations of fear in parents in the best possible way to get an edge on their competitors. The purpose of this study is:

- To study the effectiveness and impact of FOMO-based marketing in the Indian context by taking the case of a young educational-technology start-up— WhiteHat Jr.
- To study the extent to which this FOMO marketing impacts in capturing long-term consumers.
- To analyze the efficacy of this strategy and its long-term sustainability.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Emergence of FOMO in the popular culture and its Psychological Impact:

The 'Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a compulsive behaviour emanating from emotions such as fear, guilt and regret. The term FOMO was popularized by mainstream culture. (Kang et al., 2019). Dr Dan Herman first acknowledged the presence of FOMO in his essay on consumer branding (Herman, 2000). Thereafter, this phenomenon gained immense notoriety in pop-culture cinema, social media and meme culture. FOMO and its sisters FOBO (fear of a better option), FODA (fear of doing anything), FOLO (Fear of Losing Out) MOMO (the mystery of missing out) are jealousy-related anxiety acronyms of popular culture, all of them echoing similar psychological response (Reagle, 2015).

It is a human tendency to compare individuals in society to assess their social lives by weighing themselves to their mentally accessible archetypes—the atypical social stars from an individual's close vicinity, family or friends. Friends and family members spring to the mind of an individual more readily than the "influencers or celebrities" (Oppenheimer, 2004). A FOMO appeal engenders a genuine fear of missing out, and the reactive individual (the individuals who rank higher on a FOMO scale) get drawn to avail the offer. In other words, it coerces the reactive individual to approach the offer rather than avoid it (Dillard & Anderson, 2004).

Researches in the field of psychology have linked the 'fear of missing out with excessive use of social media by devising a scale of measurement combining individual's behaviour, response (Beyenes et al., 2016), personality trait, attitude (Przybylski et al. 2013), aggravated use of the internet (Kandell, 1998) individual's anxiety in mimicking their close circles (Dykman, 2012). Seminal contributions made by researchers studying consumer's response on fear-based appeal includes the impact of negative emotions ranging from guilt (Dossey, 2014) to regret (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). Distress from not partaking in events (not buying a product, not attending a concert) obstructs future decision making (Keinan & Kivetz, 2008).

Heider (1958) theorizes that the individuals are riddled with an internal conflict that stems from the balance (rational choice, logic) and imbalance (cognitive dissonance), called the 'Social

Balance theory.' The theory claims that an individual strives to achieve an equilibrium between the two. This is how rational consumers respond to an advertisement. Fear-based advertisements hinder the logic thought (balance) and bring more cognitive dissonance in the mind of a consumer as a result of FOMO advertisements.

## **2.2 FOMO as a guerilla marketing appeal:**

Fear-based marketing strategies have witnessed tremendous growth in the recent past by opening the floor for the new brands to compete with the colossal marketing budgets of established brands. The inability of traditional marketing strategy to promote sales and consumer engagement has led to the emergence of newer forms of guerilla marketing strategy (Behal & Sareen, 2014). Over the recent past, this marketing appeal has thrust a strong foothold as an effective marketing strategy. This type of marketing appeal provides the emerging start-ups with an opportunity to increase the noticeability amongst the consumers. A quick google search for FOMO related marketing strategies yields 14,40,000 results (Google, accessed February 2021). FOMO based marketing relies on the consumer psyche of fear to gain potential customers. These appeals have a high 'call to action' ratio, drawing mostly on the internal hesitancy of the buyer to buy a product. The brands across the globe are altering their advertisements to invoke a sense of 'missing out on an experience, by tending to the insecurities of the individual (Bright & Logan, 2018; Suresh & Biswas, 2019).

Previous studies till now have analyzed the impact of fear-based FOMO marketing on the consumers' response to before and after the purchase of a product (Hodinson, 2016), bandwagon consumption behaviour arising out of collective consumption of a popular product, compulsive buying (Yeong & Kalhour, 2015) and purchase likelihood of a product (Good & Hyman, 2020). Further, this mass herd consumption of products was reported highest in the high FOMO advertisement in the luxury items category (Kang & Ma, 2020). Having seen the immense effectiveness of this on social media, both new and established brands have flocked to implement this strategy in their advertising models (Solomon, 2018). This culture has successfully managed to exert its influence in the marketing and advertising industry by significantly escalating the sales of advertisements that pander to fear-induced advertisements.



Hodkinson (2019) classified the delivery of FOMO appeals to a consumer by sorting it based on initiation (externally and internally induced) and on the basis of commercialization; commercial (webpages) and non-commercial (in person by an acquaintance via text, email). Externally delivered (advertisement, public invite) fear is found impersonal, whereas internally (social media posts in close circles, salespersons) induced appeals are more personal. Impersonal appeals are taken into consideration in advertisements.

### **FOMO Appeals on Purchase Likelihood of a Product: theoretical background**

Given the omnipresence of digitalization and the use of social media sharing, it is unsurprising that people worry about losing out on events experienced by acquaintances. FOMO-laden appeals can increase a person's FOMO, which in turn can increase the likelihood of acquiring a recommended product suggested by close friends or family members. There is a significant positive relationship between FOMO and purchase likelihood. FOMO functions in two emotional contexts—anticipated elation, anticipated resentment (Good & Hyman, 2020).

Cognitive appraisal theory, by Lazarus et al. (1986), suggests that consumers concentrate on the expected implications of selecting a decision. When considering the expected consequences of an action, the consumer establishes an expected utility approach that integrates expected emotions. In FOMO based decisions, the expected consequences of a choice is a paramount factor driving the purchase (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; Zeelenberg et al., 2010). Hirschman & Holbrook (1982) argue that anticipating positive feelings before consuming a product is studied to have increased satisfaction among the shoppers and ultimately increase their FOMO. Hearing about an upcoming event, knowing that close friends or family members plan to attend it, and experiencing heightened FOMO related to staying away, can boost purchase intentions. Hence, a FOMO-laden appeal may spur consumers to choose an experience that they might have bypassed otherwise.

Loss aversion theory also tries to offer explanations on FOMO induced appeals. According to the loss aversion theory, individuals aim to minimize their losses over potential gains. It is the psyche behind an individual's decision-making that compels individuals to pick the decision that avoids potential losses. It is generally accepted that when individuals make decisions, they seek to avoid regret, which is an unpleasant emotion. FOMO bases advertisements provoke the emotion

of 'regret' in the mind of the decision making, forcing them to opt for the option that would yield minimum loss. When advertisements are framed in the form of a loss, the fear of missing out intensifies, paving the way for the biased decision-making under 'risk' or 'fear' in this context (Kahneman and Tversky, 2013).

## **2.4 Research Gap**

While there is a vast repository of literature on the psychological and consumer impact of FOMO based appeals, this appeal lacks research from a brand's point of view. The research on fear-based marketing is limited to the individual's psyche and purchase likelihood. The research on the brand's FOMO marketing choice has not been explored. There is a huge gap in the literature of case studies analyzing this guerilla marketing strategy. Moreover, case studies of brands practising FOMO based marketing have exclusively been limited to country-wise analysis. The current literature has explored the purchase likelihood of a product. However, such studies have not been undertaken in India as of yet.

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### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case-based paper centres around the case of WhiteHat Jr. to build the thesis around the theme. The case study of this paper so far has explored literature on marketing techniques of one such unicorn in India. In order to understand the decision making of consumers, the paper reviewed the literature on FOMO marketing appeals, its behavioural implications on the consumers and built it on Prospect theory's theoretical framework to understand the case in detail. This case study gleaned secondary sources such as reputed newspaper articles, journals articles, working and research papers and information available on WhiteHat Jr.'s website, social media handles-Twitter and Facebook. The data structure of the case study was built on Ken's (2020) investigative report. For this paper, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs database and Economic Outlook were used to extract funding information of the Ed-tech start-up. Through this case study, the paper aims to explore a newly emerging facet of marketing, which has been a clandestine tactic used by brands. The paper aims to expose this marketing appeal and delves into the long-term reputation and sustainability of the brand.

## CHAPTER IV: CASE ANALYSIS

WhiteHat Jr. is an Educational-Technology start-up that was founded in 2018 as a coding, AI, robotics platform for children between the age of 6-14 years. Owing to the lack of coding exposure in young children, founder and CEO Mr Karan Bajaj landed on the idea to manifest a generation of young children into young creators instead of mere consumers of AI. It sought to bring a culture of coding into the conventional curriculum of children. This idea of a coding platform soon gained a niche amongst the parents of young children working in the tech industry. Within the first year of its launch, WhiteHat Jr. was operating across multiple countries, including India, the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. The operation of the platform offered a 1:1, online live teaching session. In order for WhiteHat Jr. to break into every Indian household, the marketing team projected advertisements using a guerilla marketing strategy. The advertisements read as:

*“Your kid will become an entrepreneur this lockdown.”*

*“Your kid is just one step away from becoming the next inspiration for the world. Sign up for online coding classes,”*

*“Coder at Age 7, Microsoft CEO at the Age of 21” with an image of Bill Gates*

*“7-year kid, XYZ from ABC school, became the youngest app developer. Book your free session now to prepare your child to be a future entrepreneur.”*

*“12-year-old who learnt AI to get a Rs 1.2 crores (\$160,000) job from Google while other kids his age didn’t know what to do after school.*

*“Stand a chance to win a WhiteHat Jr. \$15,000 fellowship to start their own company.”*

*Your kid will be on the next flight to Silicon Valley, USA,”*

*“We’d love for you to get one of our last available spots!*

[Refer to the Appendix to view the advertisements]

In a country such as India, where the focus on academics runs deep, the ed-tech platform realized the gains it could make by subtly inducing fear in the minds of parents (consumers). Moreover, more than half (50%) of its user base resides in non-metropolitan cities, for whom tech pioneers are an inspiration.

WhiteHat Jr. used the photograph of tech wiz of likes of Bill Gates, Sundar Pichai, Mark Zuckerberg in the advertisements on social media to induce a sense of FOMO by sending out the idea that, in the twenty-first century, coding is the key to genius (Raghavendra, 2020). On top of this, WhiteHat Jr's ubiquitous mascot, by the name of "Wolf Gupta" whose age sometimes becomes 7, 10 or 12 years, served as a benchmark for aspiring parents. Wolf Gupta is an enigma whose existence cannot be found even on the Google search engine. He may not be real, but he is a personified model child of digital culture. The intent behind the advertisements being to induce heavy doses of FOMO in the minds of the consumer's- Indian middle-class parents.

To further its marketing strategy, WhiteHat Jr. collaborated with mega-celebrities, including Shikar Dhawan, Madhuri Dixit, Farah Khan, and Sonu Sood, and Hrithik Roshan who convinced young parents to enroll their children into the program by providing personal feedback. Within 15 months, the company increased its valuation up to 50 times. On top of this, WhiteHat Jr. also uses scarcity appeals in order to increase its call to action. Advertisements that read "few spots available" creates an environment of limited resources, which further pushes the consumer (parents) to enroll in the platform.

Table 1: The timeline of key events highlighted

| Timeline        | Event  | Funding/Acquisition          | Valuation           |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------|---------------------|
| November, 2018  | WhiteHat establishes itself as an ed-tech start-up in an existing competitive space. | -                            | -                   |
| December, 2018  | Initial funding Nexus Venture Partners and Omidyar Network India.                    | \$1.3 million (Seed Funding) | \$6 million         |
| September, 2019 | Owl Ventures   | \$10 million (Series A)      |                     |
| July, 2020      | WhiteHat Jr. claims to hold 600,000 classes per month.                               | -                            | \$150 million (ARR) |

|               |  |                             |   |
|---------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| August, 2020  | Ed-tech behemoth, Byju's acquires WhiteHat Jr.   | \$300 million (acquisition) | - |
| October, 2020 | The Advertising Standards Council of India lodges complaints on seven advertisements from WhiteHat Jr., and 5 of those ads were found to be in violation of the ASCI Code. | -                           | - |

Apart from this, WhiteHat Jr.'s ubiquitous TV and social media advertisements pushing coding classes for kids have also been key to its growth. The call to action in the case of WhiteHat Jr. was immense by just taking the number of student enrolments. Although factors such as heavy social media and television advertising have a significant portion in gleaning the user data, FOMO marketing helped the start-up branch out from its initial niche and penetrated the Indian households. With 3 million students on its platform with 20,000 classes per day, 40,000 active monthly user base, 5,000 teachers chosen at a 0.1% acceptance rate, there are only 94 student made applications on the play store (Raghavendra, 2020).

The marketing strategy soon took a back turn when WhiteHat Jr. faced tremendous backlash on social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook. WhiteHat Jr.'s coding programs for young kids do not market the power of coding, or coding as an essential 21st-century skill; it aims at instilling fear, selling fear to the middle-class parents that their neighbours' child may be the next Steve Jobs, while the kid may not if they do not sign up for the program, hence making them loss averse in the situation. WhiteHat Jr.'s advertisements were later banned by the Advertising Standards Council of India in 2020 after a huge uproar on social media and pending lawsuits (Bhushan, 2020).

### **Scarcity Appeal:**

Scarcity advertisements is a condition of shortness or insufficiency displayed in the advertisement. Scarcity appeals may convince the consumer that the product may go out of stock in case of delayed purchase. For example, WhiteHat Jr.'s advertisement reading "book your first free session now available at a 25% discount" or "hurry up, limited slots available" are some of the measures

taken by WhiteHat Jr. to enhance the desirability of the coding classes. WhiteHat Jr. relied on FOMO appeals and created an illusion of scarcity in their advertisements by displaying "12 seats left, book your first coding session now." While the two marketing appeals contrast uniquely in their outlining, the former focuses on tending to the individual while the latter to the product, the two kinds of appeals conceivably trigger FOMO at an individual level.

In conclusion, WhiteHat Jr. has been on the receiving backlashes for its marketing strategy, which was labelled not only aggressive but also unethical at the same time. The use of the brand image of Google, Microsoft and Facebook in WhiteHat Jr.'s advertisements without their legal consent damaged the start-up's reputation eventually, forcing it to retract its advertisements and withdraw itself from the marketing strategy.

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## CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

WhiteHat Jr. started as an online platform in the hyper-competitive education-tech market. In order to sustain itself from competitors and to gain a competitive advantage in the game, the start-up laid a series of unconventional marketing strategies to expand its user base. What began as a platform for coding for young children to become future entrepreneurs diluted with time when the focus of the company became to market its product solely through fear-inducing tactics. However, it remains one of the quickest start-ups to have grown in such a short span of time. The ascent of WhiteHat Jr. during the lockdown was due to the innovation in the Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) industry. Only later did it come under the light for its steady rise and eventual fall.

The presence of fear-induced behavioural tactics is explained by the two theories. The Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 2013) argues that an individual seeks to avoid loss while making a decision. Similarly, the parents or the consumer do not want to take the onus or guilt of missing out on purchasing the courses on coding platforms; hence they end up enrolling their child. This case could be one of the classic application of loss aversion from a marketing perspective. In the Indian culture that celebrates education and toppers, for parents, the stakes are as high as the stock markets. The analysis of the case study also matches with the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus et al., 1986). In WhiteHat Jr.'s case, the parent's anticipated losses from not enrolling a child loom large. This anticipated loss tricked them into buying WhiteHat Jr.'s subscription. This is also confirmed with Zeelenberg et al. 's (2010) theoretical framework, Kang & Ma's (2020) paper on Korean teens and adults (2020), and Good & Hyman's (2020) research finding in Australian millennials.

This form of 'anticipated regret' that from not buying the subscription of courses induced fear of missing out on parents that their children will not be the next Sundar Pichai or a big name in the tech industry. Consequently, individuals (parents) overvalue their anticipated elation from buying the program, thinking it to be the game-changer for their child. Fear of missing out as a marketing tactic by WhiteHat Jr. played with the mind of an individual into overvaluing anticipated gains while undervaluing anticipated regret as found by Kang & Ma (2020) research of Korean adolescents and adults. Good & Hymen's (2020) research involving purchase likelihood.



Therefore, both anticipated elation and anticipated resentment drove the purchase behaviour of this ed-tech start-up, as confirmed by Good & Hyman's (2020) research.

The Indian middle class has often been privy to dubious marketing tactics; however, nothing such as FOMO. One of the reasons why FOMO worked fantastically for WhiteHat Jr. was because their adverts projected fear in the name of children. Having seen the importance Indians give to education, the FOMO marketing tactics worked in favour of WhiteHat Jr., which is consistent with the literature review undertaken in this paper.

In FOMO based decisions, the expected consequences of a choice are paramount. Hirschman & Holbrook's (1982) research on anticipated positive feelings before consuming the product is also in sync with consumers of WhiteHat Jr. The parents thought their child would become the next CEO of a big tech company only if their children learnt how to code at an early age. This framework is in sync with the theoretical framework of Cognitive appraisal theory. The consumers or the parents made the decision solely out of the expected positive consequences of enrolling in the platform. As also affirmed by Heider (1958), in the 'Social Balance theory', these advertisements create cognitive dissonance, swaying the consumer away from rational choice. Furthermore, the anticipated gains before enrolling the product (*"Your child will be the next CEO of Facebook"*) comes across as a future joy in the minds of the parents, clouding their judgement.

Scarcity advertisements in the above case attempted to increase sales by establishing a perception of limited supply or times deals on products. Although scarcity appeals and FOMO-included appeals strive to incite a response, there is a conceptual contrast between the two. FOMO represents an inner sensation of losing out on experiences. The lost opportunity is emphasized by FOMO-laden appeals to bring about emotions that ultimately triggers fear. In contrast, scarcity appeals reduce the time taken by consumers between deciding the product and finally securing it (Jung & Kellaris, 2004). WhiteHat Jr. relies on FOMO appeals alongside creating an illusion of scarcity in their advertisements by displaying "12 seats left, book your first coding session now." While the two marketing appeals contrast uniquely in their outlining, the former focuses on tending to the individual while the latter to the product, the two kinds of appeals conceivably trigger FOMO at an individual level.

The advertisements put up by WhiteHat Jr. targeted the insecurity of a parent by impersonal commercialization that their child will be the next big coder if he/she signs up on the coding platform. The shared community experience brings out more fear than an impersonal event. This FOMO is aggravated further when peers of the individual attend the event, ultimately escalating the peer pressure. WhiteHat Jr.'s advertisements are externally induced and fall in the commercial category.

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## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The marketing strategy is a mixture of psychological tactics and inducements. The advertisements strive not to inform parents about the pervasiveness and importance of coding but to induce the fear of missing out on an opportunity for the children by tending to the internal hesitancy. Since the parents tend to limit their losses of their child not being able to be the next name in the tech world, this marketing strategy has been proved to be useful. WhiteHat Jr.'s success in customer acquisition has been extraordinary, and it can be partly attributed to the fact that Indians give immense priority to education. Moreover, legal battles and notices also abated WhiteHat Jr's brand image. Although FOMO marketing helped make WhiteHat Jr. a household name, the brand image still suffers because of the use of this marketing strategy. As far as FOMO marketing is found useful in communicating a radical idea, it eventually is self-destructive, as the young start-up's reputation was adversely affected, and management along with the CEO apologized publicly and condemned using this aggressive strategy in the first place (Bhattacharya, 2021). This strategy may be helpful in the short-run, not so in the long run. Not only does it lead to litigations and bans, but it also hampers the brand image that it builds on fear. In times when social media platforms are heavily used to express opinions, FOMO marketing becomes a ticking time bomb.

This paper aimed at analyzing fear-induced behavioural tactics as a marketing choice by delving into advertisements that aimed at pressurizing the average consumer into enrolling in a coding platform. Prospect theory explains the backdrop of such decisions undertaken by consumers/parents. For the consumers, the anticipated loss from not enrolling their children in the coding platform looms heavily while making the decision. The anticipated losses are usually the success of the neighbour's children, the lost opportunity for their own child to be the next tech wiz. The findings of the paper conclude that capturing long-term brand loyalty and gaining organic users via FOMO marketing is unsustainable as it clouds the judgement of the parent while making a rational decision. Once the decision and the effect of the decision are rationalized, it is relieved that the consumer has realized the marketing gimmick aimed at inducing fear in them. The paper revealed that, although from a marketing gimmick, FOMO makes this choice of branding unsustainable in the long run by hampering brand image.

## **SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

FOMO marketing, in a way, has played the role of an equalizer for the emerging brands in the case of online marketing. This marketing strategy helped small start-ups in customer acquisition with their limited budgets. In the day and age of cutthroat marketing, where brands are fighting for the consumer's attention, new types of guerilla marketing techniques are emerging. Social media marketing platforms have unleashed the marketing potentials of brands. The Advertising Standards Council of India loosely regulates these adverts. Since the advent of the internet, the scale of advertising amplified magnanimously, the job of ASCI regulation has become even more challenging in recent times. Therefore, there is a need to employ more resources in scrutinizing the advertisements.

Alternatives to FOMO marketing include newer and better forms of guerilla marketing that do not raise fear in the minds of individuals to sell products. Moment marketing, a newer form of marketing that has emerged as a popular choice. In moment marketing, the brands make an advertisement based on an online trend or popular event. In a nutshell, the marketing strategy involves making adverts from popular topics and relating them somewhat to their brand. Amul is a classic example of moment marketing, wherein they take the burning topic of the day and relate it to their butter brand and publish it in the newspaper. Moment marketing is one such marketing tactic that serves as a better alternative as opposed to FOMO marketing (Ferguson, 2008).

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION**

This FOMO based appeal induced by marketers is analyzed for one Ed-tech start-up. The scope of future research could expand the FOMO marketing to the entire Indian context, taking examples from other sectors using similar appeal. The literature on FOMO marketing is limited to consumers as the centre of study. Future research could take this ahead by undertaking research from a brand's point of view. FOMO scales that measure the intensity of fear-inducement exist to study an individual's level of fear in psychology. Future research can focus on devising a scale to measure the intensity of FOMO marketing by developing a FOMO scale for the brands, a scale identifying the level of FOMO in each advertisement. The FOMO based appeals in Canada, China and France have been studied to find the driving factor of fear-based appeals, which are physical fear, self-esteem and economic appeals, respectively. A similar pan India study can be undertaken to find

which underlying fear dominates the FOMO in India. Future research can explore case studies of different brands across the globe in different consumer segments. Till now, case studies have only focused on county wise FOMO appeals.

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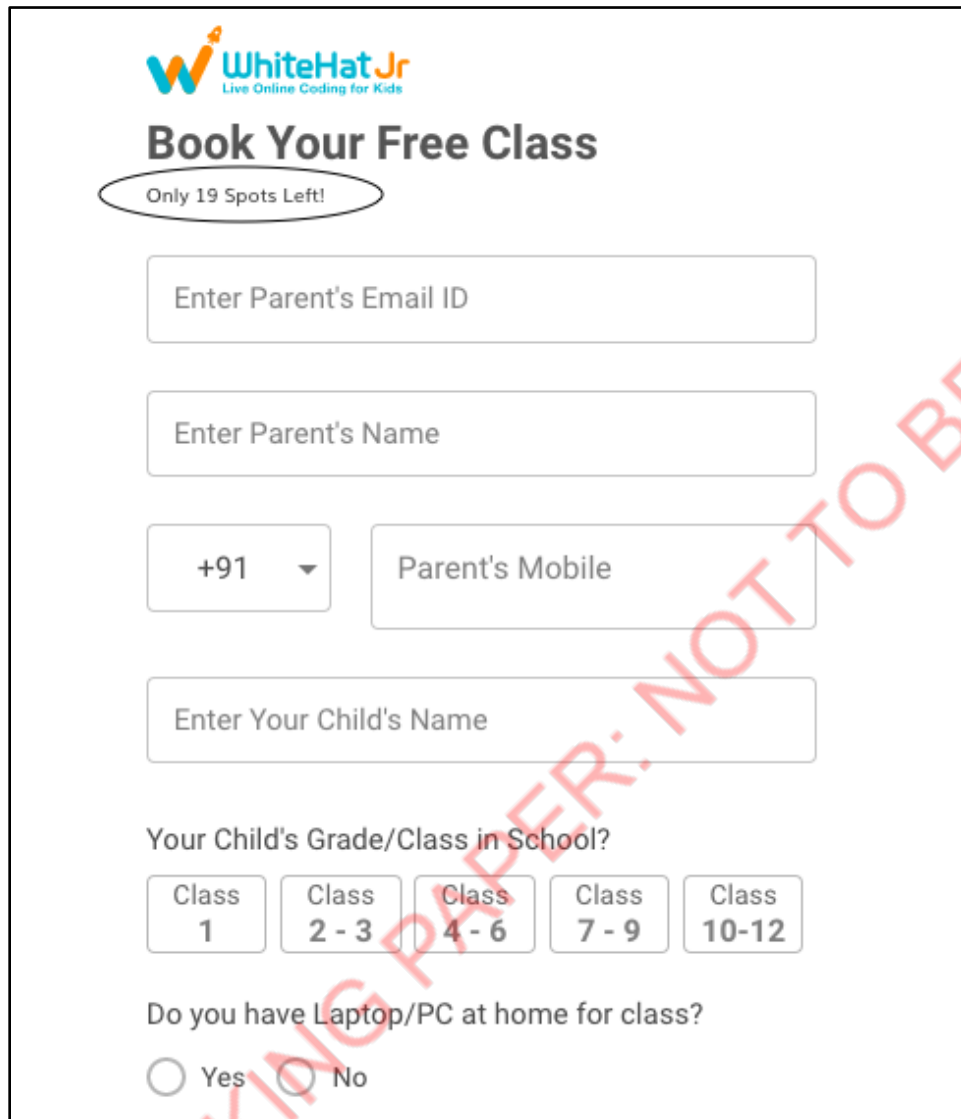
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## APPENDICES

Fig 1: The registration page of WhiteHat Jr. using scarcity appeal (19 spots left)



The image shows a registration form for WhiteHat Jr. The form is titled "Book Your Free Class" and features a scarcity appeal: "Only 19 Spots Left!". The form includes fields for "Enter Parent's Email ID", "Enter Parent's Name", a dropdown for the country code (currently set to "+91") and a field for "Parent's Mobile", and a field for "Enter Your Child's Name". Below these fields, there is a section titled "Your Child's Grade/Class in School?" with five buttons labeled "Class 1", "Class 2 - 3", "Class 4 - 6", "Class 7 - 9", and "Class 10-12". At the bottom, there is a question "Do you have Laptop/PC at home for class?" with two radio button options: "Yes" and "No". A large red watermark "WORKING PAPER: NOT TO BE CITED" is diagonally across the form.

 **WhiteHat Jr.**  
Live Online Coding for Kids

### Book Your Free Class

Only 19 Spots Left!

Enter Parent's Email ID

Enter Parent's Name

+91 ▼ Parent's Mobile

Enter Your Child's Name



Your Child's Grade/Class in School?

Class 1 Class 2 - 3 Class 4 - 6 Class 7 - 9 Class 10-12

Do you have Laptop/PC at home for class?


☐ Yes ☐ No

Fig 2: WhiteHat Jr. using the image and story of Bill Gates to induce FOMO in parents and students alike

 **WhiteHat Jr**   
about 7 months ago 

Bill Gates started coding at Age 7, founded Microsoft at Age 21 and became the world's richest person.


Book FREE Coding class for your child! No commitment. Get Coding Certification.



**Coder at Age 7**  
Microsoft CEO at age 21  
- Bill Gates

For kids age 6-14

**Book FREE Coding Class**

 **WhiteHat Jr**

CODE.WHITEHATJR.COM

**FREE Coding Certification for Kids - Book Now!**

Free Trial. 19 Spots Only.

Fig 3: WhiteHat Jr. using the success story of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg to inculcate fear purchase

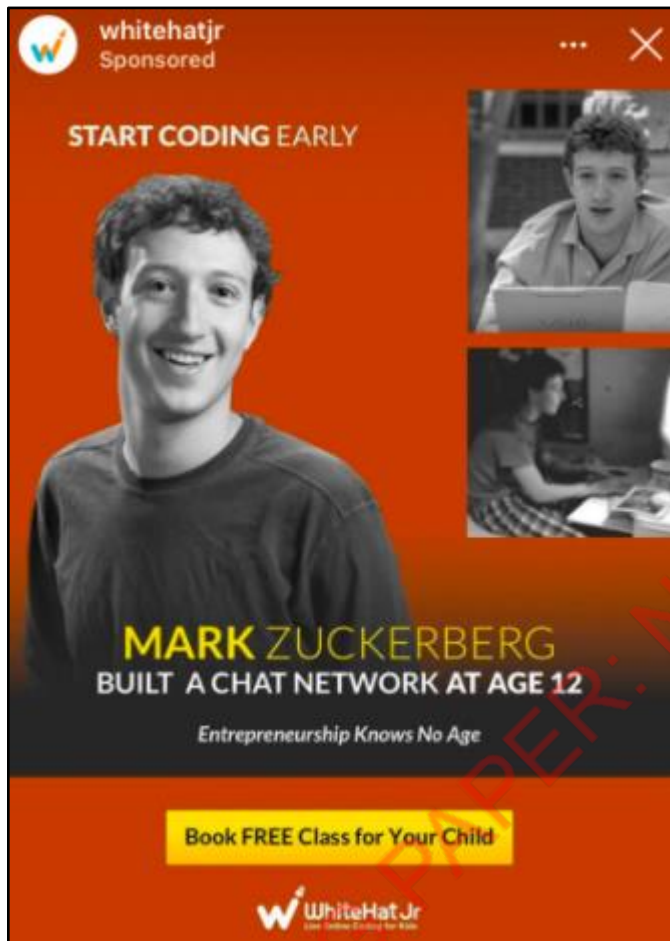


Fig 4: WhiteHat Jr. using the success story of CEO of Google Mr. Sundar Pichai to inculcate fear purchase

1 Hour FREE Coding bootcamp for Kids Age 6-14. Kids achieve complete peak of creative imagination.

"We want every kid in the world to be excited about the many possibilities coding can unlock - for themselves, for their communities and for society."  
- **Sundar Pichai**

Age 6-14

Book FREE Coding Class

FREE 1 Hour Coding Bootcamp for Kids - Schedule Now!

Book Now





Fig 5: WhiteHat Jr.'s ubiquitous, yet unknown mascot Wolf Gupta in an advertisement on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram from left to right

The figure displays three social media advertisements for WhiteHat Jr. arranged horizontally from left to right, representing Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram respectively.

- Facebook Ad (Left):** The ad features a background image of a Google building with the Google logo. The text reads: "13-year Old Wolf Gupta learnt AI to get a 20 Crores job from Google while other kids his age didn't know what to do after school. Coding makes your kids entrepreneurs and scientists in the new world. World's 1st 1:1 AI coding course for kids. Free Trial. Age 6-14 Only". Below the text is a yellow button that says "Book FREE Trial Class" and a smaller text "Coding class for kids Ages 6-14". At the bottom, there is a link "CODE.WHITEHATJR.COM" and a button "Book Now. Last 19 Spots - FREE Class! Free Class. 19 Spots Only" with a "BOOK NOW" button.
- Twitter Ad (Middle):** The ad features a background image of a Google building with the Google logo. The text reads: "13-year Old Wolf Gupta learnt AI to get a 20 Crores job from Google while other kids his age didn't know what to do after school. Coding makes your kids entrepreneurs and scientists in the new world. World's 1st 1:1 AI coding course for kids. Free Trial. Age 6-14 Only". Below the text is a yellow button that says "Book FREE Trial Class" and a smaller text "Coding class for kids Ages 6-14". At the bottom, there is a link "CODE.WHITEHATJR.COM" and a button "Book Now. Last 19 Spots - FREE Class! Free Class. 19 Spots Only" with a "BOOK NOW" button.
- Instagram Ad (Right):** The ad features a background image of a Google building with the Google logo. The text reads: "13-year Old Wolf Gupta learnt AI to get a 20 Crores job from Google while other kids his age didn't know what to do after school. Coding makes your kids entrepreneurs and scientists in the new world. World's 1st 1:1 AI coding course for kids. Free Trial. Age 6-14 Only". Below the text is a yellow button that says "Book FREE Trial Class" and a smaller text "Coding class for kids Ages 6-14". At the bottom, there is a link "CODE.WHITEHATJR.COM" and a button "Book Now. Last 19 Spots - FREE Class! Free Class. 19 Spots Only" with a "BOOK NOW" button.

A large, diagonal watermark reading "WORKING PAPER" is overlaid across the bottom half of the image.