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Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among climbers: Questioning the mountain climbing tourism industry in Indonesia in the context of contemporary change

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ABSTRACT

Mountain climbing in Indonesia has transformed significantly from a specialized exploration activity into a popular mass tourism industry, mainly driven by the influence of social media. This growth has made mountain climbing tourism one of the country's foreign exchange contributors, attracting millions of domestic and foreign climbers annually. However, this popularity has given rise to the psychological phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a social anxiety that drives individuals to follow climbing trends without adequate understanding or preparation. Using a literature review method based on credible journals, news sites, and social media platforms, this paper aims to analyze the phenomenon of the mountain climbing tourism industry in the contemporary era in relation to the emergence of FOMO as a driver of social change. This study specifically examines how FOMO has caused a shift in the meaning and motivation of climbing, from an adventure activity to a lifestyle based on trends. Furthermore, it analyzes how this change in motivation will have a reciprocal impact on the sustainability of the mountain climbing tourism industry in the future. Ultimately, this study identifies the contradictions that arise when tourism drives social change among climbers in the region.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Mountain Climbers, Tourism, Climbing Motivation, Lifestyle, Social Change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mountain climbing is an adrenaline-pumping outdoor activity due to its unusual *tracks* or trails, which differ from other types of tourism that are full of facilities. Mountain climbing is considered risky, extreme, and dangerous (Armanto, 2023). In the past, mountain climbing was synonymous with nature exploration, so climbing activities were often carried out by MAPALA or Nature Lovers Students. This is different from the current situation, where the general public is free to climb, and this activity is easily seen on social media (Nastain, 2020). Over time, mountain climbing has become a favorite tourist destination for both domestic and international tourists.

Mountain climbing tourism has gained popularity in recent years (Hilmi, 2023). Internationally, mountain climbing tourism is also known to be very popular. According to data provided by the United Nations in the framework of the International Year of Mountains, mountain tourism represents approximately 15% to 20% of total global tourism revenue (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2022). In addition, *hiking, trekking*, and climbing rank first as the most popular activities in North and South America (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2023). According to the Indonesian Mountain Guides Association (APGI) on a national scale, mountain climbing tourism has contributed US\$150 million in foreign exchange with 350,000 climbers from abroad and 9 million Indonesian climbers in 2023 (Zatnika, 2023).

Mountain climbing tourism is popular because climbing is an activity that can be enjoyed by almost everyone owing to its relatively low cost and is considered a highly sought-after form of tourism. (Yuniawati et al., 2019). Mountain climbing has since been categorized as a tourism industry because the majority of mountain climbing trails opened in Indonesia provide various facilities, including registration, transportation, and relatively complete accommodation (Andira, 2021). Additionally, social media as a global platform has contributed to boosting the popularity of tourism, including modern mountain climbing tourism (Havianto & Artiningrum, 2023). This is reinforced by Clemons and Row, 1991, de Hek 199; Werther and Klein, 2008 (in Damanik, 2013), who state that general tourism trends are greatly influenced by the penetration of information technology. However, there are certainly positive and negative consequences that accompany this.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of *Fear of Missing Out*, often referred to as FOMO, has become a hot topic of discussion lately. FOMO is a condition in which people feel worried and fearful when others may have better or more valuable experiences than themselves (Khadijah et al., 2023). Many media outlets on various platforms have written about the issue of FOMO in mountain climbing (Nariswari, 2023; Nancy, 2023; Ratriani, 2023; and Aliyya, 2024). The FOMO phenomenon has sparked pros and cons in the world of climbing. It is considered a pro because everyone has the right to "follow trends and try new things," but it is considered a con because many FOMO climbers lack a basic understanding of climbing. With the emotional state of FOMO, it is possible that it will influence decision-making through rationality that considers climbing as a lifestyle.

Intertwined with the various phenomena above, there is one quote that is very relevant to representing tourism activities and social change. A figure named Marie-Francisc Lanfant mentions that tourism has emerged as a strong driver of social change, as well as bringing contradictions to every experience. This quote introduces the idea that social change can be driven by tourism. Accordingly, two questions arise. *First*, how does the mountain-climbing tourism industry influence the emergence of FOMO as part of social change? *Second*, how does FOMO shift the meaning of climbing motivation, which is considered *a lifestyle* due to trends, and its impact on the mountain climbing tourism industry in the future?

Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to identify the mountain climbing tourism industry in the contemporary era, which is characterized by the massive flow of social media, giving rise to social change marked by the emotional condition of FOMO. Parallel to this, the tourism industry is taking advantage of the momentum to grow and create new markets. Thus, indirectly, the emotional condition of FOMO also influences the motivation for climbing—due to trends and lifestyle—and will have an impact on the mountain climbing tourism industry in the future.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon FOMO in the context of the mountain climbing tourism industry in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to explore and understand the meanings attributed to social issues by individuals or groups. This study does not aim to measure but to interpret and analyze how the tourism industry, social media, and social change are intertwined in shaping the motivations and experiences of climbers in the contemporary era.

This choice of approach is in line with the view of Creswell (2014) states that a qualitative approach is the foundation for constructing complex knowledge claims. Based on this, this study adopts a constructivist perspective, in which the phenomenon of FOMO is understood as a meaning that is constructed socially and historically through individual interactions with trends on social media and developments in the tourism sector. The research design is a literature or document study, in which the researcher constructs an understanding and thematic patterns from existing data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

Mountain climbing activities in Indonesia have undergone a significant transformation, shifting from an exclusive activity pioneered by organizations such as Mahasiswa Pecinta Alam (MAPALA) to mass tourism. This transformation has been driven by commercialization, marked by the development of modern facilities such as *online booking* systems, complete accommodations, and the rise of *open-trip* services. Support from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, which recognizes the potential of mountain tourism, further solidifies its status as an industry. The role of social media has become central in popularizing this activity, making it easily accessible and attractive to a wide audience, especially the younger generation, thereby changing the face of climbing from a limited adventure to a popular trend.

The massive exposure of hiking on social media in the contemporary era has given rise to a psychological and social phenomenon known as FOMO. FOMO, or the fear of missing out on trending experiences, significantly influences the mindset and behavior of society, especially Generation Z. This condition encourages individuals to go hiking not because of an interest in nature, but as a response to trends and the need to generate content. This phenomenon is considered a manifestation of social change, where the motivation for climbing has shifted and has negative impacts such as lack of preparation, neglect of safety for the sake of content, and potential environmental damage. Ultimately, the mountain climbing tourism industry and social media have created a cycle that stimulates FOMO, which directly changes the behavior and meaning of the climbing activity itself.

3.1.1. The Mountain Climbing Tourism Industry and the Emergence of *FOMO*—*Fear of Missing Out*—Among Climbers

The emergence of mountain climbing activities cannot be separated from the role of climbing pioneers such as MAPALA (Mahasiswa Pecinta Alam or Nature Lovers Student Association) of the University of Indonesia and Wanadri, who actively conducted expeditions on several mountains in Indonesia. With this, MAPALA groups began to grow in various campuses, including the emergence of Mapagama—a nature-loving student organization at Gadjah Mada University—which sent a team of climbers to reach the highest peak in Papua in 1984. Mountain climbing, which was previously an exclusive activity carried out only by nature lovers with limited infrastructure, has now transformed into a very popular tourist activity. This transformation cannot be separated from the central role of social media as a medium for disseminating information and promoting this extreme tourist activity.

In recent decades, due to diversification, commodification, and commercialization, mountain climbing has become a more mass tourism activity than an elite activity and can be said to have become a tourism industry (Bakar et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there is no information available on the average age of climbers in Indonesia, but the minimum age for climbers is 17 years old, and the majority are young

people who are still attending college (Cahya & Nabila, 2021). Furthermore, mountain climbing is considered a tourism industry because its facilities are constantly developing, and its potential is deemed significant for attracting tourists, given that Indonesia itself has over 400 mountains, some of which are still active. This fact was validated by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) of the Republic of Indonesia, which stated that Kemenparekraf intends to develop the potential of mountain tourism (Antara.news, 2023). In fact, Kemenparekraf also revealed that it would strengthen its commitment to mountain climbing safety through a press release on November 29, 2024 (Kemenparekraf, 2024). This provides sufficient proof that Kemenparekraf also pays attention to the mountain climbing industry in Indonesia.

The progress of the mountain climbing tourism industry is currently growing along with the availability of mountain climbing *websites* that can be accessed online, where even climbing registrations can be booked online on these *websites*. Some examples of mountain climbing sites that provide websites are Mount Rinjani in Lombok (<https://www.rinjaninationalpark.id/>); Mount Merbabu (<https://tngunungmerbabu.org/>); Mount Ciremai (<https://tngciremai.menlhk.go.id/>), and many others. In addition to advanced technology, various facilities, accommodations, and transportation are also fully available at *the base camps* and hiking trails, making *them well-prepared* in terms of safety and comfort for *hikers*, as well as for the tourism industry. Even more impressive is that there are now many *open trip* hiking services available on various mountains, complete with guaranteed facilities and guides (Figure 1)

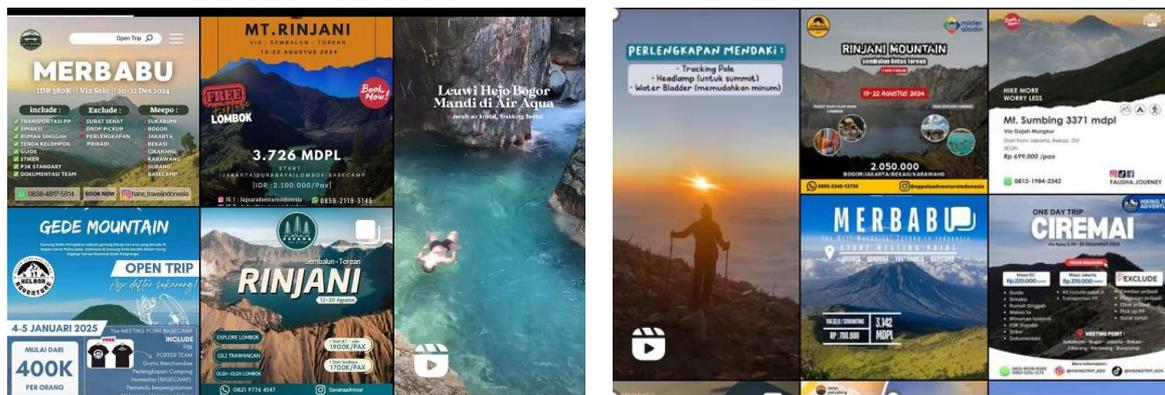


Figure 1. *Open Trip* Services on Social Media.

Source: Instagram, 2025

How does the hiking tourism industry ultimately influence the emergence of FOMO emotions? This is closely related to social media as a medium for exchanging information, particularly regarding mountain climbing activities. The dimension of time cannot be separated from this context, as it has been influenced by globalization and modernization. The contemporary era refers to the present time, which is characterized by massive advancements in science and technology. The advancement of science and technology can be seen in today's sophisticated technology, such as the emergence of social media, which allows people to access information without the limitations of space and time. In line with this, modernization is an effort to make life compatible with current conditions and times (Hasanah et al., 2023).

At the same time, the massive use of social media has the potential to change people's preferences and behavior and influence their mindset (Malinda 2024). In this case, the emotional condition of FOMO eventually sets in. This is also reinforced in the study Herawati et al., (2022), which found that social media use has a significant impact on FOMO among Generation Z. So, what is FOMO? "*Fear of Missing Out*" (FOMO) is a feeling of mental and emotional stress due to the worry that someone is missing out on experiences that appear socially beneficial and are often seen on social media networks (Alabri, 2022). In short, FOMO is the fear of missing out on experiences or social interactions that others have.

In the modern era, social change does not only occur in technology, but also touches on the psychological aspects of individuals. Thus, it can be said that the manifestation of this change is the emotional condition of FOMO, which reflects new dynamics in society influenced by modernization—technology mediates collective trends in this case, mountain climbing tourism. This is relevant to the process of social change that will affect all aspects of life without exception: art, science, religion, morality, politics, economics, and even the deepest aspects of our lives. Furthermore, social change is a transformation in the organization of society in terms of patterns of thinking and behavior at a certain time. In this case, the mountaineering tourism industry, which is growing and *trending* on various social media, has the opportunity to bring about narratives of change through emotional conditions such as FOMO, which usually targets Generation Z (Herawati et al., 2022).

Determining whether someone has FOMO or not is not easy; a questionnaire is needed to identify it. However, a study from the University of Indonesia revealed that 68% of young climbers admitted that they climb mountains mainly to get interesting photo content (Azhim, 2024). Furthermore, FOMO among climbers is very popular as a form of judgment towards climbers who pay less attention to important aspects of climbing, including not protecting the environment and forgetting about personal safety because producing content is the number one priority (Habib, 2024; Ayu, 2024). However, it should be noted that in the context of mountain climbing, it is actually acceptable to have FOMO if the main goal is to produce good content and documentation. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that preparing oneself—both physically and mentally—and not damaging nature for the sake of content is what matters most, because mountain climbing tourism is not like other types of tourism.

Thus, in this case, mountain climbing activities, which have great potential, have ultimately become a tourism industry sector that has been nationally recognized, even by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. All forms of facilities, such as websites, transportation, other conveniences, and open trips, increasingly support the practice of the mountain climbing tourism industry. This is supported by the massive use of social media in the contemporary era, which has influenced society, especially young people, to experience FOMO (fear of missing out) related to the mountain climbing trend. FOMO is also a form of social change in society due to the response of the mountain climbing tourism industry—in this case—and stimulated by social media.

3.2. Discussion

Research on the relationship between the mountain climbing tourism industry and FOMO, which ultimately influences climbing motivation and other impacts, appears to be understudied. This issue is more commonly discussed on opinion-based news platforms such as: the Kompas website by author Nariswari (2023); the Tirto.id website by author Nancy (2023); and approximately 26 other news pages discussing the issue of FOMO and mountain climbing throughout 2024.

However, there are still several studies discussing personal branding and climbers with the title "A Phenomenological Study of Gen Z Climbers' *Personal Branding* on Social Media" by Adani & Setianingrum, (2024). This study states how the use of social media, especially Instagram, shapes their *personal branding*. The result is that Instagram social media has become the main tool for building their self-image. Although this research does not seem to be directly related to my writing, upon reflection, this study is like a "second episode," where climbers who are suspected of having FOMO, whose goals are social needs, recognition, and self-actualization, will certainly also be featured on a social media platform to achieve those goals. Therefore, this study can provide further reference for this writing.

Furthermore, specifically in the tourism industry, it turns out to have an impact on social change that is considered positive or negative, including changes in cultural values, lifestyle, and even the intensity of religious practices, as contained in an article entitled "The Impact of Tourism on Social Change in the Suranadi Community" from a study by Rosyidin et al., (2024). Certain findings certainly support the findings of this paper that tourism often gives rise to social change dynamics, albeit in different forms. On the other hand, this article also explains the benefits of the tourism industry, which can have a significant impact on local communities. However, it should not be forgotten that sustainable tourism strategies must still be managed. It can be seen that the article focuses on the discussion of the tourism industry and social

change as its implication, making it quite relevant for reflection and as a complement to my writing, but with a different focus.

Specifically, the phenomenon FOMO is studied in depth in [Fitriana's \(2024\)](#) final scientific work entitled *The Phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in the Lifestyle of Urban Youth in Bekasi City*, which complements and validates the findings that the author has written from various literature reviews. This article finds that the symptoms of FOMO in the lifestyle of Bekasi City teenagers include: an inability to disconnect from gadgets, and a constant desire to know about new things and trends. Another interesting finding is that Bekasi teenagers perceive FOMO as a negative phenomenon, and that FOMO is also related to the emergence of consumptive and impulsive behavior, because items are purchased not based on what is needed, but because of what is desired—driven by social media trends. The findings in this study are highly relevant to this paper. The strength of this article, which specifically captures the phenomenon of FOMO among Bekasi teenagers, is that it reveals a universal pattern in how FOMO is perceived among Indonesian hikers—on a broader scale.

Ultimately, several references from empirical studies provide further reflection on this paper. Although the scientific literature is specific to the emotional condition of FOMO and the mountain climbing tourism industry, the above literature is like pieces of a puzzle, each with its own part but still showing relevance to one another, and a common thread can still be drawn. The relevance of the three pieces of literature to complement this paper is taken from broad themes or keywords such as FOMO, the tourism industry, and social change, which can provide a more comprehensive perspective for this paper.

FOMO is not just an emotional condition that is not manifested in any circumstances, but it often influences climbing motivation, which leads to neglecting safety and prioritizing media content to achieve a goal of recognition and a symbol of not falling behind trends. In line with this, the study mentions that there are three things that people want when they experience FOMO, namely: social needs, the need for recognition, and the need for self-actualization. However, mountain climbing is not an easy type of tourism; it is even extreme and requires sufficient preparation. This is what ultimately drives the motivation for climbing, which used to be more for nature lovers but now everyone can do mountain climbing ([Nastain, 2020](#)).

In relation to this, Max Weber divides social action theory into four categories, namely: (1) Instrumental Rational Action (*Zweck-Rationalität*): Focuses on rational considerations to achieve a specific goal. In this type of action, individuals carefully consider the most appropriate methods and strategies to achieve their goals by analyzing situations relevant to their lives; (2) Value-Rational Action (*Wert-Rationalität*): This action is carried out without too much consideration of the results or impacts, because it is driven by beliefs or values that are considered important by the individual, regardless of the possible consequences; (3) *Traditional Action*: This is an action that is carried out because of habits or traditions that have long been rooted in society and are repeated from generation to generation; (4) *Affectual Action*: These actions are influenced by the emotions and feelings of individuals, so that their actions are based more on momentary emotional impulses without considering the rational consequences of those actions.

In this case, the identification of FOMO in mountain climbing falls under affectual action, because FOMO itself is driven by emotional conditions that are sometimes irrational and do not consider future consequences—such as physical and mental preparation for climbing a mountain—the most important thing is that their goals of social needs, recognition, and self-actualization can be realized.

The motivations for decision-making in tourism, such as mountain climbing, have also been studied by [Yoeti \(1987\)](#), who found that there are four motivations, namely: *Physical Motivations*, which are closely related to physical needs such as sports; *Cultural Motivations*, which are closely related to seeing customs that are different from those of one's place of origin; *Interpersonal Motivations*, which are driven by a person's desire to visit relatives; and *Status Prestige Motivations*: for a show, meaning that a person wants to show who they are, their position, and their status in a particular community for the sake of personal prestige. In this case, the last motivation, *Status Prestige Motivations*, is the most relevant to the context of FOMO climbers.

Furthermore, mountain climbing also requires various tools to support the journey. Therefore, the egoistic desire to climb is further supported by high or impulsive consumption desires, but the orientation of purchasing goods is not for necessity but to fulfill goals based on FOMO. This condition tends to be relevant to Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumer society. The rationality of consumption in consumer society has changed significantly, because today people buy goods not as an effort to fulfill *their needs*, but more as a fulfillment of desire. He also adds that if consumption involves desire, then the consumption process is not only about economics, but also a psychological process.

If this statement is used to analyze the purchase of mountaineering equipment motivated by FOMO, then Baudrillard's statement is certainly very relevant. It can be observed that in the context of the further consequences of FOMO, the main reason someone consumes goods is to support their FOMO needs, so the consumption process is inevitable and not only due to economic factors, but also emotional conditions. Therefore, from the emergence of the mountain climbing industry, social media platforms, the rise of FOMO, to the consumption of climbing needs to support FOMO, these elements are intertwined. Furthermore, FOMO can have consequences for individuals themselves and also for the mountain climbing tourism industry in both positive and negative ways. Negative consequences can arise for individuals, one of which is that FOMO has the potential to encourage impulsive consumption. Furthermore, because the primary motivation of FOMO hikers is to seek social needs, recognition, and self-actualization, knowledge about hiking in nature is often overlooked. This includes hiking ethics such as courtesy and environmental preservation—not littering or defecating indiscriminately, picking protected flower or plant species such as edelweiss, and so on, as well as inviting the potential *for mass tourism*. This certainly has the potential to harm the natural environment of the hike, and even other hikers, if there are no strict regulations. See [Figure 2](#)



Figure 2. Overcrowding and trail congestion in hiking destinations as a manifestation of FOMO-driven mass tourism

Behind the negative consequences or impacts, there are positive impacts that are most evident in the economic sector, including: the opening of new job opportunities such as porter services, mountain motorcycle taxi services, *base camp* management, and of course, this can boost the economy of the communities living near mountain climbing tourist destinations, thereby creating prosperity. This is relevant to [Damanik's \(2013\)](#) findings that the contribution of the tourism sector to foreign exchange earnings and job creation at the macro level is quite significant. This finding is also reinforced by [Yoeti's](#)

(1999) opinion that the tourism industry is particularly effective in supporting small business development and job creation for young people, as well as spreading job opportunities regionally.

4. CONCLUSION

The process of social change is a complex phenomenon involving various aspects that interact and relate to one another. In this context, the line of thinking is based on the phenomenon of mountain climbing, which has been growing in popularity. The mountain climbing tourism industry has the potential to become a highly promising tourism industry, and even the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy is working to promote the advancement of this industry. The growing tourism industry—specifically mountain climbing—is driven by modernization, marked by further advances in science and technology, manifested through social media. Social media is the catalyst for social change, especially in the contemporary era. The social changes referred to in this article are not only those resulting from modernization or modernity itself, but also other products or phenomena created by the combination of mountain climbing and the rapid growth of social media, namely *Fear of Missing Out*. Although FOMO can actually arise from any trend or industry, this article focuses on the mountaineering industry, which is becoming increasingly *popular*. Parallel to the emotional condition of FOMO, FOMO is also capable of influencing the motivation for climbing, which has shifted from the past to the present. The phenomenon of shifting motivation for climbing, manifested through the act of climbing tourism, is analyzed using Max Weber's Social Action Theory. Intertwined with this, FOMO ultimately also encourages its perpetrators to be consumptive and impulsive because the impact of purchasing goods is based solely on desire or passion, which is certainly driven by the emotional condition of FOMO. Therefore, the urgency of this paper is to explore the phenomenon of social change that can be created through the popular tourism industry, which is then stimulated by various things, including social media. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the relationship between these aspects comprehensively, as each aspect contributes differently.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable

Authors' Contributions

IN as the corresponding author, was responsible for the conceptualization, study design, data collection and analysis, literature review, and writing of the manuscript. He also managed the submission and review process.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Notes on Contributors

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