



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Rise of Drop Culture

A Qualitative Exploration of Consumer Behaviour, Scarcity Marketing, and Fear of Missing Out in Limited-Edition Product Releases

Aditi Gupta¹, Keshvi Bafna², Nandini Gupta³, Vikramaditya Periwal⁴, Dr. Rainy Rose⁵

Abstract: Drop culture refers to a marketing tactic when brands create demand through scarcity, exclusivity and digital interactions released as limited-edition products. While much literature covers themes such as scarcity marketing, social media impacts, FoMO and resales separately, few studies look into consumer behaviour within drop culture. Thus, this study qualitatively researched what drives consumers psychologically, socially and behaviorally to buy into limited-edition releases.

Design/methodology/approach: Using triangulation methodology, this study conducted an exploratory qualitative study. Data was gathered through 15 semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire with 287 valid responses. Thematic analysis was conducted on both data sets using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase methodology.

Findings: Four themes emerged: Exclusivity and Status, FOMO and Purchase Urgency, Community and Brand Connection, and Resale and Hype. The findings of this study conclude that consumers do not simply buy a product; they buy into an idea. Symbolic value, self-expression, community and belonging, and potential resale value were all contributors to customers' decision-making. Social media can enhance hype and consumers' pre-purchase excitement.

Originality/value: This study offers qualitative insight into consumer psychology and current digital consumerism.

Keywords: Drop culture, scarcity marketing, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), consumer behaviour, social media, limited-edition products.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Drop Culture

Drop culture is a marketing and consumption trend in which companies put out limited-run items in small amounts, usually with minimal notice. It generates excitement, a sense of urgency, and the feeling of exclusivity among consumers (Huang & Kim-Vick, 2020). Although it started in the streetwear scene with brands such as Supreme, the trend has since spread to the field of luxury fashion, footwear, food services, and online shopping, and has thus become a marketing strategy widely used in various industries (Huang, 2021). Research indicates that drop culture is based on the deliberate use of scarcity, exclusivity, and consumer anticipation, all of which serve to boost demand and engagement prior to product launches (Huang & Kim-Vick, 2020). Social media has in turn reinforced this method by enabling brands to generate excitement, develop online communities, and promote real-time consumer involvement (Huang,

2021). Nevertheless, even though drop culture is becoming more popular, current research mainly concentrates on industry practices rather than on consumer behaviour. As a result, there is a need for further research into the psychological and behavioural factors that affect people's participation in drop culture, particularly among Gen Z consumers. Given that scarcity and exclusivity are at the heart of drop culture, a understanding of scarcity marketing helps to explain why consumers react so strongly to limited-edition launches.

1.2 Scarcity Marketing and Exclusivity

The concept behind scarcity marketing is that if something is difficult to obtain, they want it. When brands restrict their production of a certain product or availability of the product for a limited time, people rush to buy it before they run out. This can give the impression that the product is more valuable. Brands also develop exclusiveness by providing special products to specific people, such as customers and members. This can make customers feel like they are being treated as a special customer, and can create repeat sales. Loyalty can be created and a brand's presence in the crowded market can be strengthened with the combination of scarcity and exclusivity.

Scarcity marketing is a strategy used by companies to intentionally reduce the supply of products to stimulate consumer demand and drive sales. Empirical research has proven that scarcity positively influences the consumer's attitudes, purchase intentions, willingness to pay, sense of 'exclusiveness' and impulse buying behaviour (Oruc, 2015; Ladeira et al., 2023). Various types of scarcity—such as limited quantity scarcity, limited time scarcity, demand-induced scarcity, and supply-induced scarcity—generate a sense of urgency and lead to quicker purchase decisions (Amara et al., 2022). The results of the research suggest that scarcity due to demand is more effective than scarcity due to supply, as high demand perceived by consumers is interpreted as the product is desirable and popular. It is also symbolic scarcity and therefore has symbolic effects on people's sense of exclusivity, the evaluation of the product and their competitive consuming behaviour (Oruc, 2015). Scarcity appeals, similarly, satisfy mental requirements in terms of uniqueness, social distinction and future regret avoidance (Abdollahi et al., 2022).

1.3 Social Media Amplification

The effectiveness of scarcity marketing has been transformed by social media, since it has allowed messages related to a product to spread quickly outside of the usual marketing channels. Research demonstrates that algorithmic recommendations, endorsements by influencers, user-generated content, and viral sharing greatly increase the reach of information about a product and strengthen people's perceptions of its popularity, exclusivity, and desirability (Chadwick et al., 2022; Milli et al., 2025). It has been found that content which appeals emotionally and is interactive is amplified more than neutral content, which makes messages based on scarcity especially effective at drawing in consumers' attention and prompting engagement (Milli et al., 2025). On visual-first platforms such as Instagram this process is further boosted by audiovisual communication, the way content is discovered and user interaction, leading to greater visibility of information about products (Chadwick et al., 2022). Social media platforms therefore go beyond simply distributing information since they also actively influence the way consumers perceive the value and desirability of products.

According to Social Amplification Theory, the more people are exposed to information, the greater its perceived importance and relevance becomes. In a similar way, Social Proof Theory states that consumers see likes, shares, and other online interactions as signs of a product's value and popularity. Furthermore, both the Bandwagon Effect and Social Identity Theory show how consumers take part in trends that are widely discussed in order to obtain social recognition and to strengthen their feeling of belonging. These views are supported by Chadwick et al. (2022), who found that sharing motivations, platform features, and social interactions affects how information spreads on line, and Lim and Bentley (2022) demonstrated

that amplified opinions can reinforce shared perceptions among members of online communities. Since people are constantly exposed to content relating to scarcity, to promotions by influencers, and to the participation of their peers, there is a psychological pressure to engage with exclusive products; thus Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) becomes an important connection between social media influence and consumer decision-making.

1.4 Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The anxiety that consumers experience when they believe they might be missing out on valuable opportunities, experiences, or products that other people are enjoying is known as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media has made this phenomenon more prominent since consumers are now frequently exposed to the activities, purchases, and experiences of their peers, influencers, and celebrities, which in turn makes FoMO have a greater impact on consumer behaviour (Elhai et al., 2021). FoMO can be explained by means of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that people who have unmet needs regarding social belonging and connection are more likely to feel FoMO. In order to meet these needs, consumers usually take part in popular trends and consumption activities in order to obtain approval and acceptance.

Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory shows that consumers continually compare themselves with others, and social media increases the number of such comparisons by giving them access to exclusive products and experiences promoted by influencers and peers (Yin et al., 2021). It has consistently been shown that FoMO is linked to greater purchase intentions, impulsive buying, and consumption driven by a sense of urgency (Gupta & Shrivastava, 2022; Hodgkinson, 2019). At the same time, it may lead to a number of negative consequences, including anxiety, compulsive buying, buyer's remorse, and regret after making a purchase (Akbari et al., 2021). For this reason, FoMO functions as an important psychological mechanism that connects scarcity and the influence of social media with consumer behaviour. Although it promotes people's involvement in exclusive product launches, it also raises doubts as to whether consumers are forming real brand relationships or are merely reacting to hype-driven consumption.

1.5 Brand Loyalty vs Hype Culture

The fact that consumers take part in exclusive product launches motivated by fear of missing out leads to doubts about how consumer-brand relationships are evolving. According to the traditional literature on consumer behaviour, brand loyalty is described as a long-term commitment characterised by making repeat purchases, having trust, feeling an emotional attachment to the brand and preferring it over competing alternatives. Consumers who are loyal build up enduring relationships as a result of consistently receiving satisfactory experiences, and therefore brand loyalty plays an important role in building brand equity and in achieving long-term business success (Palomba, 2020). Traditional notions of loyalty have, however, been put into question by changing consumer markets. Dedehayir and Steinert (2016) point out that consumer attention is now more and more shaped by hype, this hype being caused by collective enthusiasm, social influence, and the elevated expectations associated with products and brands. In these kinds of situations, engagement tends to revolve around particular product launches or cultural events rather than on ongoing brand relationships

Research indicates that consumers nowadays get value not just from the brand itself but also from the symbolic and social meanings connected with consumption. Sanil (2025) points out that people develop stronger ties with brands that match the self-image and social identity they want to project. Products connected with highly anticipated launches—such as Supreme drops, the Nike x Travis Scott collaborations, or Labubu collectibles—can serve to show cultural relevance, indicate membership in a

community, and bring about social recognition beyond their practical use. As a result, current patterns of consumer engagement involve a balance between traditional brand loyalty and consumption based on hype, with symbolic value and social influence playing an ever-increasing role in people's purchasing choices. This change also applies beyond the first purchase, since products that are highly desired often keep their value in secondary markets.

1.6 Resale

The growth of hype-driven consumption has led to an increase in resale culture, which involves people buying, exchanging and selling products that are highly desirable once they have been first released. Different from traditional patterns of consumption, resale markets enable consumers to function both as buyers and as sellers, thus extending the economic and symbolic value of the products past the original purchase. Studies have shown that people's involvement in resale markets is affected by economic advantages, access to unique items, and shifting views on ownership and consumption (Kim & Kim, 2020; Liu et al., 2023). Kim and Kim (2020) discovered that consumers are becoming more inclined to see limited-edition items as assets that may have future value, especially in areas like sneakers and streetwear.

The rise of digital resale platforms has also facilitated speculative consumption, meaning that people now buy products both for their own use and with the intention of making a profit when reselling them. Consequently, products are assessed not just on their functional and symbolic value but also on their possible financial return (Berghueser, 2025). In addition to economic reasons, research also points out the importance of social and personal factors in people's involvement in resales. People are drawn to resale markets since they offer access to rare items, chances for self-expression, and a sense of recognition in online communities (Kim & Kim, 2020; Liu et al., 2023).

1.7 Limited Edition Products

Limited-edition items have developed from being merely promotional tools into symbols of identity, exclusivity, and self-expression. The fact that they are available in limited quantities does not only create immediate demand but also adds to their long-term desirability and resale value. Research shows that consumers who want to be unique react more favourably to limited-edition products since such products enable them to show their individuality and set themselves apart from others (Dörnyei & Lunardo, 2021; Jang et al., 2015). Social influences also increase consumers' interest in limited-edition items. When making a purchase, consumers tend to take into account the views and actions of the groups they look to for guidance, and exclusive products serve to show off one's status, way of life, and personal identity (Amaldoss & Jain, 2010; Shin et al., 2017). Ownership of such limited-edition products thus acts as a means of social signalling and enables consumers to show that they have cultural awareness and feel a sense of belonging. This is in accordance with the Need for Uniqueness Theory, which accounts for the desire among consumers to have products that help them create distinct identities, and with Reference Group Theory, which emphasizes the impact of social groups on consumer choices (Dörnyei & Lunardo, 2021; Amaldoss & Jain, 2010).

II. RESEARCH GAP

1. Existing literature has largely examined scarcity marketing, social media amplification, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), resale culture, and limited-edition products independently, with limited research integrating these factors to explain consumer behaviour in drop culture.

2. Existing research has primarily focused on drop-based marketing strategies from a brand perspective, while comparatively limited attention has been given to understanding the psychological, social, and behavioural factors that drive consumer participation in drop culture.

3. Despite the growing popularity of drop culture, there remains limited qualitative research exploring consumers' perceptions, experiences, and decision-making processes within digitally driven marketplaces.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this study was exploratory and a qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, motivations, and experiences of consumers about drop culture. Considering drop culture is a new trend that is driven by scarcity marketing, social media interaction and changing consumption habits in the digital world, an exploratory approach was found suitable to investigate the underlying psychological and social drivers for consumer participation.

In order to increase the findings richness and credibility, methodological triangulation was used in gathering data from two complementary qualitative data sources. Semi-structured interviews allowed for rich, experience-based narratives which allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and motivations. The online questionnaire was not designed for statistical hypothesis testing, but was presented in a format that was structured. Rather, it was meant to capture more of the consumer experience and patterns among a wider sample of consumers. Themes emerged from both sources through a process of thematic analysis with common themes around scarcity, exclusivity, social media influence, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), participation of the community and resale behaviour. The study also brings together the depth of interviews with the breadth of a greater number of consumer responses to create a holistic qualitative insight into the processes of consumer engagement in drop culture.

The study took place in the context of digital consumer culture, in which brands are increasingly starting to use scarcity-based tactics to stir up demand, hype and build brand engagement. Although the concept of drop culture began in street culture and sneaker culture, it has since been adopted by industries including fashion, beauty, tech, collectibles and lifestyle. The rise of social media, influencer marketing and online brand communities has also helped drive the growth of drop-based marketing strategies, which is where this comes into play, when studying contemporary consumer behavior.

The present study is exploratory qualitative in nature and aims at understanding the factors affecting the perception, motivation and experience of the drop culture by the consumer in depth. Given the phenomenon of the drop culture, which was created by the man of the scarcity marketing, the importance of social media in this culture, and the constant changes in the ICT consumption culture, an exploratory method was considered as suitable for the investigation of the underlying psychological and social factors, which push consumers into participation.

To enhance and validate the findings from the first two sources of data collection that were of qualitative nature, methodological triangulation was used. The qualitative interviews were mostly semi-structured, resulting in rich and experience-based narratives, which facilitated the in-depth exploration of the participants' perceptions and motivations. There were no statistical tests performed, however, the online questionnaire was well formatted. Instead, it targeted gathering a broader range of consumers' experiences and patterns from a broader sample of respondents. Responses from both sources were combined and analysed through thematic analysis to find out common themes connected with scarcity, exclusivity, occurrence of social media influence, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), participation in the community, and resale behaviour. The study combines the information from the interviews with the broader spectrum of consumers' reactions to understand how consumers interact with drop culture.

This study is conducted in the background of digital consumer culture, in which brands are increasingly using scarcity-based marketing practices to create demand, customer excitement and further engage customers. Even though the roots of drop culture are in streetwear and sneaker culture, it has since permeated into other industries, such as fashion, beauty, tech and collectibles and lifestyle. The advent of

social media, influencer marketing and online brand communities has given rise to drop-based marketing, which is a fitting environment for a discussion on modern day consumer behavior.

3.2 Participant Recruitment and Sampling

This research was carried out in two phases of primary data collection. The first stage involved 15 semi-structured interviews with consumers with previous experience in buying or interaction with limited edition products releases. Purposive sampling was used to assure that participants had the knowledge and first-hand experience of drop culture. Participants in the interviews came from a variety of consumer categories: sneaker fans, fashion and beauty fans, technology consumers, luxury consumers, resellers and young professionals. Interviews went on until thematic saturation was reached, and additional interviews did not yield any significantly new information. The second stage involved conducting an online questionnaire via Google Forms, with convenience sampling. The questionnaire was sent to a social network, the University network and personal contacts of people with experience in digital shopping environments and limited product launches. Twenty-eight (286) valid responses were received. The larger sample allowed for the researchers to insightfully explore the reoccurrence and uniformity of their perceptions, experiences, and behaviour at the interview stage in a wider cohort of consumers.

3.3 Research Instrument

Two complimentary research instruments were used to collect data. The first was a structured online questionnaire created on Google Forms to collect consumers' attitudes, perceptions and behaviours towards drop culture and limited editions product releases. The first was a structured online questionnaire prepared using Google Forms, which was used to collect the consumers' attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards drop culture and limited editions product releases. The questionnaire consisted of demographic, behavioural, and perception-based questions that focused on participants' perception and awareness of drop culture, their shopping patterns, feelings about scarcity-based marketing, the influence of social media, their attitudes toward exclusivity, and their resale culture.

The second instrument was the semi-structured interview guide that was constructed around the main concepts that were identified in the literature review: scarcity marketing, exclusivity, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), social media influence, brand engagement and purchase motivations. The semi-structured format allowed for uniformity in interviews yet allowed participants to write about their experiences and to have the interviewer ask questions if relevant. The interviews were conducted online or in person and each lasted around 30 – 45 minutes depending on the availability of participants.

The research instruments were designed based on concepts that have been discussed in the literature review of scarcity marketing, consumer behaviour, social identity, brand communities and digital consumerism. The questions aimed to uncover the influence of product exclusiveness, product urgency, community engagement, and perceived product resell value on consumer decision-making in the context of drop culture.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

There were two stages of data collection. This online questionnaire was given using Google Forms and sent out via social media, University networks and personal contacts. Before participating, respondents were briefed on the aim of the study, made to know that participation in the research was voluntary and were encouraged to give honest answers based on their experiences of limited-edition product releases and drop culture. All responses were confirmed automatically and safely recorded using Google Forms and then compiled for analysis.

After the completion of the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposive samples of the respondents. Participants were informed about the objectives of the research and informed consent was obtained before each interview. An interview guide was developed flexibly to allow the

participants to describe their experiences in buying limited editions, their understanding of a sense of being out of stock, the emotional reactions to a “scarcity marketing” strategy, the influence of social media and connection with brand communities. Probing questions were used as needed to gain more insight and to clarify participants’ answers.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used on data from semi-structured interviews and the on-line questionnaire according to Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcripts of interviews and answers to questions were read repeatedly to familiarize the researcher with the data. Both the datasets were inductively coded and compared with initial descriptive codes to find similarities and patterns. A structured questionnaire was used comprising multiple-choice questions and questions with a Likert scale, but the answers were not analyzed inferentially statistically. Attention was given to the meanings, perceptions and behavioural tendencies expressed in the participants’ responses.

Results from the questionnaire were compared to the results from the interviews, and methodological triangulation was used to increase the credibility of the results. As an iterative coding process, related codes were grouped into larger themes and then distilled down to four themes: Exclusivity and Status, FOMO and Purchase Urgency, Community and Brand Connection, and Resale and Hype.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Several efforts were made to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The coded interviews and questionnaire answers were repeated analysed repeatedly during the coding process to ensure accurate interpretation of the viewpoints of the participants. Codes and emerging themes were always compared and refined to keep codes consistent and researcher bias to a minimum. The findings were further supported by methodological triangulation which allowed for comparison of common patterns emerging from both the interview and the questionnaire responses. Interviews were continued until the saturation of themes was reached, that is, until no significant new themes arose from further interviews. Two complementary qualitative data sources were integrated to complement each other and increase the depth and reliability of the findings, which also gave a more comprehensive view of consumer participation in drop culture.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines were followed during the research process. All respondents to the questionnaire and interviews gave their consent and were fully informed of the purpose of the study. All participants were told that information would be anonymous and kept confidential and would be used only for academic research purposes. No personal data was gathered and all answers were kept confidential and only accessible by the research team. Research participants were allowed to drop out of the study at any point without repercussions. The willingness to maintain anonymity of participants and to keep individual responses from them unidentified was maintained through both analysis of the findings and the presentation of the findings.

3.8 Themes Generated from the Analysis

The present study was not descriptive or inferential statistical analysis because the questionnaire was in the form of structured responses such as multiple choices and Likert scale. Responses were analysed using a qualitative thematic approach to find patterns, perceptions and motivations related to drop culture. The items in the Likert scale were not analyzed statistically, but rather are interpreted as aspects of the participant’s attitude and experiences. This was deemed suitable because the study was exploratory and aimed to explore the reasons behind consumers’ involvement with drop culture, not statistical associations between variables.

An inductive thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used for the analysis of the data after the data familiarization. The coding process was systematic from coding to categorization to theming. Recurring words, phrases, ideas and concepts spoken by the participants were first located and descriptive codes assigned. These codes were very similar to the words used by respondents: Exclusivity, Social Status, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Brand Community, Marketing Hype and Resale Value. The codes found were then compared for similarities and classified into larger categories that represented similar concepts. For instance, codes Exclusivity, Product Uniqueness, Limited Ownership were combined into Exclusivity, and Urgency, Anticipation, Frustration were combined into Purchase Urgency. Lastly, related categories were clustered into four main themes, representing the predominant trends in the data set: Exclusivity and Status, FOMO and Purchase Urgency, Community and Brand Connection, Resale and Hype. The hierarchical approach allowed the researchers to translate the individual participant's responses into conceptual interpretations, but without losing sight of the original data for each theme.

The four major themes identified with the thematic analysis identified the major patterns in the responses

Table 3.8 : Themes generated from the analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes
Exclusivity, Product Uniqueness, Limited Ownership	Exclusivity	Exclusivity and Status
FOMO, Urgency, Excitement, Anticipation, Frustration	Purchase Urgency	FOMO and Purchase Urgency
Brand Community, Belonging, Brand Loyalty, Shared Experience	Consumer Engagement	Community and Brand Connection
Marketing Hype, Resale Value, Artificial Scarcity, Sell-Out Culture	Hype & Secondary Market	Resale and Hype

IV. RESULTS

This analysis combines the results obtained from the online questionnaire (N = 287) with those from eighteen semi-structured interviews carried out with consumers who are actively involved in drop culture. The interview data was coded separately and then compared to the four themes that were found in the questionnaire. If the answers given during the interviews coincide with data from the survey, this is referred to, as it strengthens the findings of the study by using methodological triangulation as a tool.

4.1 Exclusivity and Status (Theme 1)

Codes: Exclusivity, Social Status, Product Uniqueness, Limited Ownership, Self-Expression

The main points that emerged from the consumers' answers predicted one topic: Exclusivity and Status, indicating that consumers view drop culture beyond just a process of product purchase and one that deals with identity expression, social recognition, and symbolic consumption. The theme of exclusivity, uniqueness and status signaling was a constant theme throughout the coding process. Although the respondents acknowledged that they took product quality into consideration, many saw limited edition

products as a sign of distinction that distinguished them from the masses of normal consumers. One of the biggest factors in this was the Social Status factor. About 143 of the 287 respondents named 'To show off/Social status' as the main reason for buying products that were made available through drops. Furthermore, Social Status also emerged as one of the more frequently reported motivations to switch back to brands that offer drop products, highlighting the association between limited editions and prestige, recognition, and a better social image. Product uniqueness was closely related to something that had to do with status. The respondents consistently identified uniqueness as one of the bases of value-added: if the same product were no longer exclusive, they wouldn't consider it of value, many said; if it were offered as a non-exclusive product, it would seem a lot less exciting, some said. These findings suggest that people aren't only valuing the object itself, they're valuing the symbolic place it has in their lives, because of its rarity. The Limited Ownership code was created because people kept on thinking of limited availability as exclusivity. They were aware that brands often artificially limit the supply on purpose, but they believed that this would make the product more desirable and valuable. The mix of suspicion and yearning reveals the intricacies of contemporary drop culture. It was concluded that the code referred to, called 'Self-Expression', revealed that people were associating exclusive products with 'self' and 'community' more than with mere 'consumption'. Regarding why they participate in drops, 122 respondents told us they do so to demonstrate their "community" or sense of belonging to a group. This was substantiated by the findings of the interview. It was not only about being shown off and displaying wealth, the participants said that it was about being recognised, being a personality, achieving something and being part of a community through exclusive products. Also, many of them emphasized that brands are not only products, but identities and experiences, reinforcing the survey finding that exclusivity is of symbolic and emotional value. The results collectively demonstrate that the theme of Exclusivity and Status can be developed based on the following findings, which indicate that prestige, uniqueness, limited ownership, and identity expression are the most important factors affecting consumer behavior in the context of drop culture, where there are exclusive products that are essentially social and psychological assets, not just functional purchases.

4.2 FOMO and Purchase Urgency (Theme 2)

Codes: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Urgency, Excitement, Anticipation, Frustration

Another prominent theme that emerged during the analysis was FOMO or the need to purchase something at the last minute. While the first theme was used to explain the value consumers put on limited editions, it was the theme used to explain their immediate purchase behaviour. As part of the coding process, the respondents regularly showed emotional reactions linked to scarcity such as fear of missing out on opportunities, excitement about the launch of a product, anticipation prior to a product drop, and frustration when they couldn't get the products. These repeated emotional reactions made up this theme. The most important was the fear of missing out (FOMO). Some 91 respondents said that FOMO was a big factor influencing their product drop purchases. Although it's less prevalent than other motivations, such as social status, FOMO is nevertheless an important component of buying. It rarely happens alone and is often accompanied by other drivers, like social status and involvement in the community, suggesting that consumers are not only worried about being deprived of the product but also the social aspect connected to owning it. Many of the respondents pointed out that the Urgency code made the products more desirable than identical non-exclusive products because they were scarce and therefore gave less time to evaluate and people were thus pushed into making hasty buying decisions. Another notable code was Excitement, which was a sign of good anticipation surrounding product launches, announcements, and the introduction of limited editions. This seemed to be a fun experience for consumers, and not just purchasing a product. Similarly, when prompted to ask about engagement, Anticipation was found, as the respondents monitored the announcements, watched the dates of the launches and looked forward to the forthcoming releases, highlighting the power of scarcity marketing for engagement before the products are ever released. Purchase urgency's opposite was the last code, Frustration. When the products could not be found because of their high sell-out rates, limited availability, reseller activity and resale prices, people were often displeased with it. Look at the excitement that goes through people's minds before a product launches and the frustration when they fail to buy it and you'll see how powerful the emotions are in drop culture. The results of the interview very strongly backed this theme. One of the main reasons for buying was always "FOMO," the participants said. Participant one said it was the key driver of participation in drops and participant two confessed that the excitement on social media had swayed her purchase.

Participant five commented that he found that the feeling of scarcity influenced his thoughts from “Do I really need this?” to “What if I don't get this?” Similarly, participant eight indicated that she felt relieved rather than happy when she made the purchase, participant nine noted that it was easier to be concerned about not feeling bad afterwards than to be concerned about the cost, and participant fourteen stated that the scarcity effect caused her to think more about how she would feel afterwards than when she evaluated the product. The findings from the questionnaire corroborate the following statements, which say that urgency, anticipation and FOMO are strong emotions that are able to influence someone's buying decision beyond impulse buying. To sum up: scarcity influences consumers not only by being exclusive, but also by invoking strong emotions such as the fear of missing out, sense of urgency, anticipation, excitement and frustration; these emotions are the ones that make consumers typically make an instant purchasing decision when the product is limited edition. As a result, FOMO and Purchase Urgency have become a separate theme describing the emotional processes that underlie consumer involvement in drop culture.

4.3 Community and Brand Connection (Theme 3)

Codes: Brand Community, Belonging, Brand Loyalty, Shared Experience

While the previous themes illustrate what draws buyers to purchase exclusive products and the elements influencing the buying decision at the point-of-purchase, this theme centers on sustaining the connection with the brand from the first-time purchase. The findings demonstrate that drop culture extends beyond the mere acquisition of exclusive goods due to their scarcity, creating brand communities and fostering long-term relationships with the buyer. In coding the responses, related concepts concerning community engagement, belonging, shared experiences and brand loyalty were clustered into Community and Brand Connection as a key theme. Notably, Brand Community emerged as a significant code in theme three. In particular, 122 out of 287 respondents indicated that one of the reasons for engaging in product drops is ‘to feel part of a community.’ Indeed, the respondents associated product drop culture with social interactions, engaging with other enthusiasts who share similar interests and values as well as appreciation for particular brands and their products. The code belonging stood out in the theme as many respondents desired to feel connected and be part of a group of individuals interested in similar products and brand communities. It is noteworthy that belonging appeared alongside exclusivity and FOMO as respondents sought to gain acceptance and uniqueness simultaneously. This study found that consumers purchase limited edition products to identify themselves and at the same time feel part of a particular group or community. The code brand loyalty demonstrated that respondents remained loyal to brands that launched products with limited availability for a long time. This was primarily due to the exciting, unique and exclusive nature of the brands’ recurrent drop culture. Similarly, the code shared experience emerged as some respondents valued the collective experience of engaging in the drop culture including following countdowns, social media interactions as well as the general rush that comes with landing on products. This is further demonstrated by the comments made during the interview. For instance, participant seven (P7) compared the sense of ownership of exclusive products to joining a club where conversations took place conveniently. On the other hand, participant ten (P10) said that she participates in the culture to avoid feeling left out of online groups concerning fashion. In turn, participant eighteen (P18) said that she buys the experience that comes with the product, not the shoes, while participant one (P1) said that he likes interacting with other participants in Discord groups awaiting product releases. The quotes highlight the survey results about the motivation and significance of engaging in online brand communities. In particular, the findings illustrate that the presence of peer groups as well as brand communities influences consumer participation. This is because such groups foster belonging, identity and long-term connection with the brand. Overall, the theme highlights that successful drop culture entails more than scarcity as it offers emotional and social value that influences consumer loyalty and connection.

4.4 Resale and Hype

Codes: Marketing Hype, Resale Value, Artificial Scarcity, Sell-Out Culture

The previous theme illustrates how brand communities contribute to the long-term connection between the brand and the consumer. This section expands on how hype, artificial scarcity as well as the dynamics involved in the secondary market motivate and influence participation in product drops. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents recognized the marketing tactics utilized by companies during product launches. In particular, the respondents noted that the marketing hype, artificial scarcity, rapid sell-out of products, as well as the resale value of the goods, influenced their decisions to participate in product drops. As such, the responses were clustered into four codes, namely: marketing hype, resale value, artificial scarcity, and sell-out culture.

The first code concerned marketing hype around product launches. It is noteworthy that respondents associated marketing hype with influencer marketing, countdowns, announcements by celebrities, and overall social media activity surrounding the launch of the products. They identified these strategies as effective in driving hype and engaging the audience. In particular, the respondents demonstrated that marketing hype was a significant contributor to the increased interest in the drop culture. Moreover, it was evident that respondents associated product launch hype with excitement and motivation to engage with the brand.

Furthermore, resale value stood out as a critical element influencing the responses. Indeed, respondents indicated that limited edition products enabled them to achieve personal use and profit from the goods. In particular, 104 out of 287 respondents marked 'to resell for profit' as one of the reasons for buying limited edition products. Therefore, this study demonstrates that the ability to obtain monetary benefits from limited edition products influences consumer behavior.

In addition, respondents identified artificial scarcity as a key factor in the motivation and influence of product drop culture. Specifically, 113 participants out of 287 believed that intentional scarcity encouraged demand for goods despite their unavailability. Interestingly, the majority of the respondents highlighted that artificial scarcity does not diminish their interest in the goods despite recognizing the manipulation around limited availability. This indicates that the perceived value of the goods overrides the manipulation around artificial scarcity.

The final code that emerged from the responses is sell-out culture. According to the respondents, rapid sell-out of products plays an essential role in driving demand for goods. In particular, participants highlighted that companies utilize the sell-out culture to drive hype around the launches. As such, this study demonstrates that sell-out culture promotes the demand for limited edition goods. Indeed, the majority of respondents found that scarcity increases the value of the goods, thus the motivation to purchase them.

Notably, the findings from the interviews supported the results from the questionnaire. Participant four (P4), a full-time reseller of sneakers, said that scarcity is the whole business model around sneakers as reselling depends on the limited supply of goods. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that artificial scarcity is a marketing tactic that does not eliminate their desire for a particular good. For instance, participant one (P1) compared his experience with that of watching a magician as a child, while participant two (P2) and participant five (P5) admitted that their knowledge around artificial scarcity does not reduce their buying behavior. Finally, the respondents demonstrated that consumers contribute to hype around product launch, thus supporting sell-out culture. For instance, participant thirteen (P13) said that it is consumers who hype around product launches more than the brands do while participant twenty (P20) acknowledged that people promote goods on social media, thus helping companies generate more interest for the product.

Table 4.5: Summary of Qualitative Themes Identified from Consumer Survey Data

Theme	Code	Description	Representative Survey Evidence	Approx. Frequency
Theme 1: Exclusivity and Status	Exclusivity	Consumers perceive limited availability as increasing the desirability and symbolic value of products.	Respondents indicated that exclusivity makes products feel more valuable and special.	~132 responses
	Social Status	Ownership of limited-edition products is associated with prestige, recognition, and social image.	"To show off/Social status" selected as a purchase motivation.	143 responses
	Product Uniqueness	Consumers value products because they are rare and distinguish them from others.	Preference for exclusive products over identical non-exclusive alternatives.	~132 responses
	Limited Ownership	Restricted product availability creates a sense of privilege and rarity.	Responses indicating that limited supply enhances product value and ownership experience.	~96 responses
	Self-Expression	Consumers use exclusive products to express individuality and personal identity.	"To feel part of a community" and identity-driven responses.	~122 responses
Theme 2: FOMO and Purchase Urgency	Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	Anxiety about losing the opportunity to purchase exclusive products.	"Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)" was selected as a purchase motivation.	91 responses
	Urgency	Limited stock and time-sensitive releases encourage immediate purchase decisions.	Responses indicating pressure to buy before products sell out.	Frequently observed
	Excitement	Positive emotional response generated by exclusive product launches.	Enthusiasm towards limited-edition releases and drop events.	Frequently observed
	Anticipation	Consumers actively wait for upcoming drops and product announcements.	Interest in countdowns, launch dates, and exclusive releases.	Frequently observed

	Frustration	Negative emotions are experienced when consumers fail to obtain exclusive products.	Responses expressing disappointment after missing product drops or facing stock shortages.	Frequently observed
Theme 3: Community and Brand Connection	Brand Community	Consumers participate in drops to connect with like-minded individuals.	"To feel part of a community" was selected as a key motivation.	122 responses
	Belonging	Exclusive product ownership creates feelings of inclusion within a community.	Responses linking ownership with acceptance and community membership.	Frequently observed
	Brand Loyalty	Consumers continue engaging with brands that consistently offer exclusive releases.	Repeat participation in drops due to trust and positive brand experiences.	Frequently observed
	Shared Experience	Consumers value participating in launches, discussions, and online interactions surrounding product drops.	Responses referring to countdowns, launch events, and social media engagement.	Frequently observed
Theme 4: Resale and Hype	Marketing Hype	Promotional activities create excitement and anticipation before product releases.	Responses recognizing influencer marketing, teaser campaigns, and social media promotions.	Frequently observed
	Resale Value	Consumers purchase products intending to resell them for financial gain.	"To resell for profit" selected as purchase motivation.	104 responses
	Artificial Scarcity	Consumers recognize brands deliberately limit product availability to increase demand.	Responses agree that brands intentionally create scarcity.	113 responses
	Sell-Out Culture	Rapid stock depletion increases perceived product desirability and future participation.	Responses indicate that quick sell-outs increase excitement and perceived value.	Frequently observed

V. CONCLUSION

The research conducted in this paper explored factors that influence consumer participation in view of an exploratory qualitative study. The key findings identified Exclusivity and Status, FOMO and Purchase Urgency, Community and Brand Connection, and Resale and Hype as four themes that determine the role of drop culture on consumer behavior. The study revealed that the motivation of consumers to engage in drops is determined by psychological, social, and behavioral factors. These factors are manifested in the concepts of exclusivity, brand connection, FOMO, and hype as essential enablers of drop culture. The study's findings demonstrate how different facets of consumer behavior come together to influence the purchasing decisions of consumers in the context of digital marketplace culture. The research also provides a more comprehensive perspective on the role and impact of drop culture by considering the combined effect of scarcity, social media, hype, and reselling. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon being researched and offer practical implications that may help in shaping the effective drop strategies.

Further research on the topic of drop culture can be achieved by conducting comparative studies among different categories of consumers, industries, and cultures. In addition, quantitative studies that explore the dynamics of drop culture over a prolonged period can be conducted to provide additional insights into the phenomenon. Finally, the research can be extended to include mixed-methods approaches and longitudinal studies to enhance the quality of findings.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, for facilitating such wonderful ambience for us to pursue higher education. The authors also express their deepest gratitude to Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, for providing guidance, support, and cooperation during the completion of this research study. Moreover, we would like to thank the faculty guide for giving us direction and sharing knowledge and experience with us throughout the process. We are also obliged to everyone who participated in the interviews and questionnaire survey as a part of this research study. All of you were of great help to us, and your effort has become the major pillar of this research work.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abdollahi, B., Salimi, A., & Rahimi, G. (2022). The effect of scarcity appeals on consumer purchase intention: A systematic review. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 68, 103070.
- [2] Akbari, M., Foroudi, P., Shahmoradi, M., & Padash, H. (2021). Fear of missing out (FoMO) and consumer buying behavior: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102496.
- [3] Amaldoss, W., & Jain, S. (2010). Reference groups and product line decisions: An experimental investigation of limited editions. *Management Science*, 56(4), 621–644.
- [4] Amara, D., Bensebaa, F., & Boudali, L. (2022). Scarcity marketing and consumer behavior: The moderating role of product involvement. *Journal of Business Research*, 145, 728–739.
- [5] Berghueser, G. (2025). *Resale markets and consumer value creation in digital commerce*. Springer.
- [6] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- [7] Chadwick, A., Vaccari, C., & O'Loughlin, B. (2022). Social media, information diffusion, and digital engagement. *New Media & Society*, 24(5), 1052–1070.
- [8] Dedehayir, O., & Steinert, M. (2016). The hype cycle model: A review and future directions. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 108, 28–41.
- [9] Dörnyei, K. R., & Lunardo, R. (2021). Limited edition products and consumers' need for uniqueness. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 38(5), 517–529.
- [10] Elhai, J. D., Yang, H., Rozgonjuk, D., & Montag, C. (2021). Using Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) to examine relations between social media use and psychological well-being. *Addictive Behaviors*, 114, 106699.

- [11] Gupta, S., & Shrivastava, P. (2022). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and impulse buying behavior in online retailing. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(6), 2347–2361.
- [12] Hodgkinson, C. (2019). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) marketing appeals: A conceptual model. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(1), 65–88.
- [13] Huang, R. (2021). Drop culture and scarcity marketing in contemporary fashion retailing. *Fashion and Textiles*, 8(1), 1–18.
- [14] Huang, R., & Kim-Vick, J. (2020). Scarcity marketing, exclusivity, and consumer engagement in streetwear culture. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 24(4), 567–583.
- [15] Jang, W. E., Ko, Y. J., Morris, J. D., & Chang, Y. (2015). Scarcity message effects on consumer responses to limited-edition products. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 21(5), 647–668.
- [16] Kim, J., & Kim, M. (2020). Consumer motivations in online resale markets. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 543–552.
- [17] Ladeira, W. J., Santini, F. D. O., Pinto, D. C., & Araújo, C. F. (2023). The impact of scarcity appeals on consumer behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 70, 103158.
- [18] Lim, W. M., & Bentley, P. J. (2022). Social amplification and online consumer engagement. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(5), 1108–1123.
- [19] Liu, Y., Zhang, H., & Wang, J. (2023). Consumer behavior in the circular economy: Motivations for participating in resale platforms. *Sustainability*, 15(8), 6891.
- [20] Milli, A., Kumar, S., & Verma, P. (2025). Social media algorithms and digital marketing amplification: Effects on consumer engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 69, 101–117.
- [21] Oruc, R. (2015). Effects of scarcity messages on consumers' purchase intentions. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 30, 558–566.
- [22] Palomba, A. (2020). Brand loyalty in the digital age: Consumer engagement and relationship marketing. *Journal of Brand Management*, 27(4), 412–425.
- [23] Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of Fear of Missing Out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848.
- [24] Sanil, V. (2025). Consumer identity and symbolic consumption in digital brand communities. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 25(1), 88–106.
- [25] Shin, H., Eastman, J. K., & Mothersbaugh, D. L. (2017). The influence of limited-edition products on consumer purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 39, 151–158.
- [26] Tseng, T. H., Balabanis, G., & Liu, M. T. (2021). Consumer responses to limited-edition products: A review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 124, 176–188.
- [27] Yin, J., Wang, X., & Yang, Z. (2021). Social comparison, Fear of Missing Out, and consumer purchase intentions in social commerce. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 48, 101073.