

I SWEAR I HEARD THIS...

FOMO AND CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION AT MUSIC EVENTS IN INDIA

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On a sunny day in December last year, I was late for a string quartet performance in the western Indian city of Panaji. The event was supposed to start at 5:30 p.m.; I arrived at the venue at 5:45 p.m. A notice outside the black-box venue — and polite volunteers — told me that I was too late: “No admission once the performance starts”. Despite a lifetime of being a journalist, I am yet to master the technique of forcing my way into events. So, I waited patiently outside, hoping for the event to end, when I could go in and, perhaps, meet some of the performers.

Not all latecomers, however, were as docile as me. A few minutes after I had been turned away, a man arrived with his wife and teenage daughter. They demanded to be let into the venue. When the volunteers informed him that admission was not possible after the show had started, he demanded a refund. “Your website doesn’t say anything about stopping admission because of late arrival,” he shouted. His wife claimed to be related to one of the performers. In a strange turn of events, he started knocking on the door of the venue. Taken completely by surprise, the volunteers eventually allowed the family — as well as a few other latecomers like me — to enter the venue.

Even while watching the performance, I wondered what meaning such disruption had for the audience — those creating it, those experiencing it. One reason for such behaviour was, of course, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). If indeed the disruptive latecomers were related to one of the performers, missing the performance had the potential to affect familial relationships. However, scholars of events and management professionals are now studying how FOMO is a familiar audience experience at large events and music festivals, and how it can be used to promote events and boost ticket sales.

Ticketing portal Eventbrite (2015) advocates using “FOMO to make your event a-go-go!” It suggests several strategies such as “Do something cool!” and “Tease your audience”. Hodgkinson (2016) identifies that FOMO has “an entrenched and successful form of marketing appeal among young consumers” and argues that a better understanding of it from a managerial perspective is likely to “enhance the effectiveness of FOMO as a purchase trigger”. The forced social distancing and isolation of COVID-19 has also increased FOMO among consumers, especially of events, at times leading to conspicuous consumption (Dursun et. al., 2023).

In India, the use of FOMO as a marketing tool was evident during two recent events — the tour of the country by British rock band Coldplay in late 2024 and concerts by Bhangra artist and Bollywood actor Diljit Dosanjh earlier that year. Prices of tickets for the former started at ₹2,500-

35,000 (£22-£300) but soared to ₹3.5 lakh (£3,000) (*The Economic Times*, 2024). Along with it, prices of air tickets and hotel rooms spiralled in the host cities, Ahmedabad and Mumbai, on the days of the concert. Music critic Suanshu Khurana (2024) argued that “the rush for tickets seemed to be motivated by the desire for Instagrammable moments” rather than an actual love for this music. Even Indian prime minister Narendra Modi commented on the potential for capitalising on this potential for the creative industries in India and organised a highly publicised meeting with Dosanj (Sayantani, 2025).

However, a new report by Blume Ventures, a venture capital fund, shows that out of India’s 1.4-billion-strong population, 1 billion have no discretionary purchasing power (Inamdar, 2025). India’s consuming class is only about 130-140 million people, about the same as Mexico. This leaves one wondering: Who is paying the inflated ticket prices for music concerts? What does this tell us about access to the arts in India? What does this tell us about inequality in the world’s most populous country? These are research areas that need to be explored, both by economists and those studying the creative industries.

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