



From Fear of Missing Out to Healthy Lifestyle: Understanding Motivation and Decision-Making in Padel Participation

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Abstract

Padel has rapidly emerged as one of the fastest-growing sports worldwide, including in Indonesia, where it has become increasingly associated with urban lifestyles, social interaction, and digital culture. This study aims to explore the motivations and decision-making processes underlying participation in padel, particularly in relation to healthy lifestyle orientation and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving five participants from diverse occupational backgrounds. The data were analyzed thematically using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Consumer Behaviour Theory. The findings reveal that participation in padel is influenced by a combination of social, health, and lifestyle factors. FOMO, social media exposure, and peer influence serve as important triggers for initial participation, while sustained involvement is driven by enjoyment, health benefits, skill development, and social connectedness. The study also shows that participants gradually shift from externally driven motivations to more intrinsic forms of motivation. Furthermore, participation decisions are shaped not only by functional considerations but also by symbolic values related to identity, status, and social belonging. This study concludes that padel participation represents a dynamic interaction between FOMO, motivation, and behavioural decision-making, which may ultimately develop into a sustainable healthy lifestyle practice.

Keywords: padel, FOMO, healthy lifestyle, Self-Determination Theory, consumer behaviour, lifestyle sport.

1 Introduction

In recent years, padel has experienced rapid growth as one of the most popular emerging sports worldwide, including in Indonesia. According to the International Padel Federation (FIP), the

number of padel players globally has reached more than 25 million people across over 90 countries, accompanied by a significant increase in courts and clubs worldwide. Deloitte (2023) further identifies padel as one of the fastest-growing sports industries globally due to its accessibility, recreational appeal, and strong social dimensions. In Indonesia, although padel remains relatively new compared to badminton or futsal, its growth has accelerated significantly in major urban areas such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Bali. This trend is reflected in the rapid increase of commercial padel courts, sports communities, and social media exposure promoting padel-related lifestyles. Reports from local sports communities and digital media indicate that the number of padel courts in Jakarta and surrounding urban areas has increased substantially within the last three years, demonstrating the growing demand for this sport among urban middle-class communities.

The rapid expansion of padel reflects broader transformations in contemporary urban lifestyles, where sports are increasingly associated not only with physical activity but also with identity formation, leisure consumption, and social interaction. From the perspective of Sport Sociology, modern sport functions as a cultural practice through which individuals construct social identity and lifestyle preferences (Coakley, 2015). Padel's characteristics—easy to learn, socially interactive, and recreational—align closely with the preferences of urban communities seeking flexible and socially engaging physical activities. This tendency is consistent with findings from the World Leisure Organization (2020), which highlight that contemporary leisure activities increasingly prioritize emotional experiences, social connectedness, and symbolic lifestyle value. In addition, increasing public awareness regarding physical and mental health has contributed to the growing participation in recreational sports. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that regular physical activity plays a significant role in preventing non-communicable diseases and improving mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2020). Previous studies have shown that recreational sports participation contributes positively to stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Biddle & Asare, 2011; Eime et al., 2013). This issue has become increasingly relevant in urban societies characterized by high work pressure and burnout. The World Health Organization classifies burnout as a syndrome resulting from unmanaged chronic workplace stress (World Health Organization, 2019). Empirical studies in Indonesia also demonstrate that physical activity significantly contributes to reducing burnout and improving well-being among working individuals (Mahesa et al., 2023; Karim & Hambali, 2023; Putra et al., 2025). Consequently, sports such as padel are increasingly perceived not merely as exercise but also as coping mechanisms for managing stress and enhancing social interaction. However, the growing popularity of padel cannot be separated from the influence of digital culture and social trends. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have contributed significantly to the visibility and desirability of padel among urban youth. This phenomenon is closely related to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a psychological condition characterized by anxiety arising from the perception of being excluded from socially valued experiences. Previous studies indicate that digital exposure and social influence strongly shape participation in trending lifestyle activities. Research by Suari and Pidada (2025) found that content marketing significantly influences FOMO and increases Generation Z participation in the padel trend, while the bandwagon effect strengthens the relationship between social media exposure and participation behavior. These findings suggest that decisions to participate in padel are not solely driven by health awareness but are also shaped by social recognition, peer influence, and the desire to maintain social belonging.

Despite the growing popularity of padel, existing studies remain limited in several important aspects. First, most previous research on sports participation focuses predominantly on quantitative approaches emphasizing health benefits, consumer satisfaction, or marketing aspects, while qualitative explorations of motivational dynamics and decision-making processes remain scarce. Second, studies examining padel specifically within the Indonesian context are still very limited, particularly those investigating how individuals negotiate intrinsic motivations related to

healthy lifestyles alongside extrinsic motivations associated with trends, social pressure, and FOMO. Third, although previous studies have discussed FOMO in digital and consumer contexts, limited research has connected FOMO with participation in recreational sports as a form of symbolic lifestyle consumption and identity formation in urban societies.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by employing a qualitative case study approach to explore how urban individuals in Indonesia construct meanings, motivations, and decision-making processes regarding participation in padel. This study contributes theoretically to the broader discourse of Sport Sociology, consumer behavior, and FOMO by demonstrating how contemporary sports participation is shaped through the intersection of health consciousness, social identity, and digital culture. Furthermore, this research provides empirical insights into how emerging sports trends function not only as physical activities but also as symbolic lifestyle practices within urban Indonesian society.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Global Growth and the Popularity of Padel

In recent years, padel has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sports worldwide. According to the International Padel Federation (FIP), the number of padel players has increased significantly, reaching tens of millions globally, accompanied by rapid expansion in the number of courts, clubs, and tournaments across various countries. This trend is further reinforced by Deloitte (2023), which identifies padel as one of the fastest-growing sports industries globally.

The rapid diffusion of padel cannot be explained solely through sporting preferences. Rather, it reflects broader socio-cultural transformations associated with globalization, urban lifestyles, and digital connectivity. The growth of padel in countries outside its traditional European market demonstrates how contemporary sports increasingly function as cultural commodities embedded within lifestyle consumption patterns. In this context, participation in sport extends beyond physical activity and becomes a medium for identity expression, social interaction, and symbolic consumption.

Indonesia represents a relevant example of this phenomenon. The expansion of padel facilities in metropolitan areas such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Bali reflects increasing demand among urban middle-class communities. The popularity of padel has been accelerated by social media exposure, celebrity endorsements, and the visibility of participation within social networks. Consequently, padel has developed not only as a recreational sport but also as a lifestyle practice associated with modernity, social status, and community belonging (Deloitte, 2023; FIP, 2023). From a sociological perspective, the emergence of padel illustrates how contemporary sport consumption is shaped by interactions between global trends and local social dynamics. Therefore, understanding why individuals participate in padel requires examining not only health-related motivations but also psychological and social factors that influence behavioural decisions.

2.2 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and the Social Construction of Sports Participation

One important factor explaining the rapid adoption of padel is the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO refers to a psychological condition characterized by anxiety arising from the perception that others are experiencing rewarding activities while one is absent from those experiences. In highly connected digital environments, social media platforms continuously expose individuals to curated representations of leisure activities, thereby increasing awareness of emerging trends and reinforcing social comparison processes.

Within the context of sports participation, FOMO operates as a social mechanism that encourages individuals to engage in activities perceived as popular, prestigious, or socially desirable. Suari and Pidada (2025) found that content marketing positively influences FOMO among Generation Z, which subsequently increases participation in padel activities. Their findings also demonstrate that the bandwagon effect mediates this relationship, suggesting that individuals are more likely to participate when they perceive widespread adoption among peers.

However, FOMO should not be viewed merely as a negative psychological response. In the context of emerging sports, FOMO can function as an initial trigger that introduces individuals to new forms of physical activity. Social influence, digital visibility, and peer participation create external motivations that encourage first-time engagement. Nevertheless, whether participation becomes sustained over time depends on subsequent motivational processes and personal experiences.

This distinction is particularly important for understanding padel participation. While some individuals may initially join because of social trends and fear of exclusion, others may gradually develop deeper motivations related to enjoyment, health improvement, and social connectedness. Consequently, FOMO can be conceptualized as an entry point in the behavioural process rather than the sole explanation for continued participation.

2.3 Understanding Padel Participation through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

To explain how initial participation develops into sustained involvement, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a useful theoretical framework. Developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), SDT proposes that human behaviour is driven by different forms of motivation that vary in the degree of self-determination.

SDT distinguishes between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement in an activity because it is inherently enjoyable or satisfying, whereas extrinsic motivation involves participation driven by external rewards, social expectations, or perceived pressures. Importantly, SDT views motivation as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy, allowing individuals to move from externally regulated behaviour toward more autonomous forms of motivation.

In the context of padel, FOMO-related participation can initially be understood as a form of extrinsic motivation. Individuals may decide to play because their friends participate, because the sport is trending on social media, or because participation contributes to a desired social image. However, continued involvement depends on whether participation fulfills three fundamental psychological needs identified by SDT: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Padel possesses characteristics that potentially satisfy these needs. Players can experience autonomy through voluntary participation, competence through skill development and performance improvement, and relatedness through social interaction and community engagement. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals are more likely to internalize their motivation and continue participating even after the initial trend diminishes.

Therefore, SDT offers an important explanation for the transition from trend-driven participation to genuine commitment. This perspective suggests that FOMO may initiate behavioural engagement, but long-term participation is more likely to be sustained by intrinsic motivation and psychological need satisfaction.

2.4 Decision-Making Process in Padel Participation

While SDT explains motivational dynamics, Consumer Behaviour Theory provides a framework for understanding how motivations are translated into actual participation decisions. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), consumer decision-making generally consists of five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour.

In conventional consumer settings, these stages are often portrayed as rational and sequential. However, participation in contemporary lifestyle sports such as padel frequently follows a more socially driven pathway. Exposure to social media content, recommendations from peers, and observations of trending behaviour may accelerate or even bypass certain stages of evaluation. Within this process, FOMO influences the early stages of need recognition and information search by creating awareness of potential social exclusion. Individuals then seek information regarding padel facilities, costs, accessibility, and social experiences. During the evaluation stage, symbolic benefits such as prestige, social belonging, and lifestyle compatibility may become as influential as functional benefits such as physical fitness.

Once participation occurs, post-participation experiences become critical. Positive experiences, enjoyment, skill improvement, and social interaction can reinforce continued engagement. Conversely, if participation fails to satisfy psychological needs, involvement may remain temporary and trend-driven. Thus, post-decision behaviour represents an important mechanism through which extrinsic motivations can either evolve into intrinsic motivations or disappear altogether.

2.5 Conceptual Synthesis and Research Framework

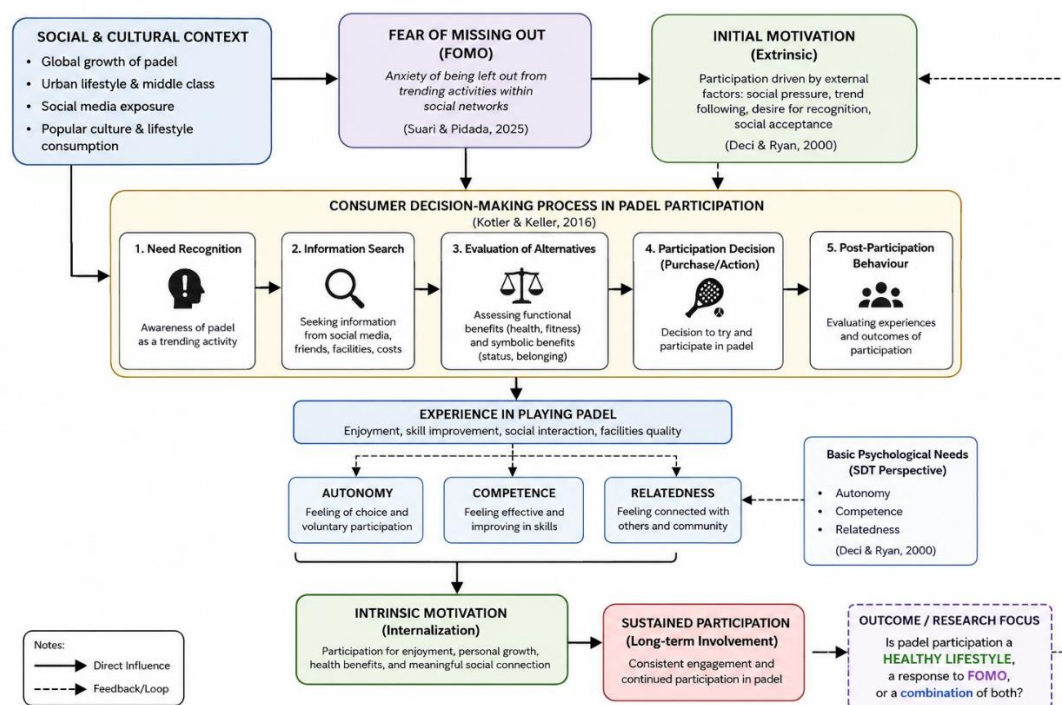
Based on the literature reviewed, participation in padel can be understood as a dynamic process involving social influence, motivational transformation, and behavioural decision-making. FOMO acts as an external social stimulus that encourages initial engagement with padel. This stimulus generates extrinsic motivation and influences the early stages of decision-making, particularly need recognition and information search.

However, participation does not necessarily remain trend-driven. Through actual engagement in padel, individuals may experience enjoyment, competence development, and social connectedness. Consistent with Self-Determination Theory, these experiences facilitate the internalization of motivation from external regulation toward more autonomous forms of motivation. As a result, participation may evolve from a temporary response to social trends into a meaningful and sustainable lifestyle practice.

Consumer Behaviour Theory complements this explanation by illustrating how motivations are translated into concrete behavioural decisions. The integration of these perspectives suggests that padel participation is shaped by an interaction between social pressures (FOMO), motivational processes (SDT), and decision-making mechanisms (Consumer Behaviour Theory).

Accordingly, this study investigates whether participation in padel among urban communities represents a manifestation of healthy lifestyle orientation, a response to FOMO, or a combination of both. More specifically, the study explores how individuals experience and negotiate these motivations throughout their decision-making process and continued participation in padel activities. The research framework is as follows:

Figure 1. Research Framework



Source: Primary Data

3 Research Methods

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method to obtain an in-depth understanding of the growing popularity of padel within the context of urban lifestyles. The qualitative case study approach was considered appropriate because this research aimed to explore how and why individuals interpret their participation in padel, whether as part of a healthy lifestyle or as a socially driven trend associated with Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). According to Yin (2018), case study research enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its social context are not clearly evident.

In this study, padel was positioned not merely as a physical or recreational activity, but as a socio-cultural phenomenon closely related to lifestyle construction, social interaction, identity formation, and digital culture. Therefore, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to capture the complexity of participants' experiences, motivations, and interpretations in a more contextual and holistic manner.

3.2 Research Subjects

The subjects in this study were selected using purposive sampling, namely the selection of participants based on their involvement, experiences, and understanding of padel as either a healthy lifestyle practice or a form of FOMO-driven participation. The study involved five main informants: Keysa, a university student (21 years old); Yasmin, a housewife (30 years old); Kania, a lecturer (33 years old); Anwar, a civil servant (45 years old); and Gaisan, a private-sector employee (37 years old). The diversity of participants' occupational and social backgrounds was

intentionally considered to provide a broader range of perspectives regarding motivations, social experiences, and decision-making processes related to padel participation.

The process of identifying participants began with Kania, who acted as a gatekeeper and assisted the researcher in accessing individuals actively involved in padel communities. Subsequently, the participant recruitment process was expanded through snowball sampling, where initial informants recommended other relevant participants who met the research criteria. Initially, the study involved ten prospective participants. However, during the data collection process, only five informants consistently participated until the completion of the study. Several participants withdrew voluntarily, while others were difficult to contact for follow-up interviews.

Nevertheless, this condition did not reduce the validity of the study because qualitative research prioritizes the depth, richness, and contextual meaning of data rather than the quantity of participants. The addition of participants was conducted until data saturation was achieved, namely the stage at which the information obtained became repetitive and no substantially new themes emerged. By the fifth participant, recurring patterns regarding health motivations, social influence, lifestyle symbolism, and FOMO-related experiences had consistently appeared across interviews and observations. Therefore, the five informants were considered sufficient to provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

In addition to the main informants, the study also involved cross-check informants consisting of friends, family members, and playing partners who were familiar with the participants' padel activities. Their inclusion aimed to strengthen data credibility and provide contextual verification regarding participants' behaviours and experiences.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary research instrument. In this study, the researcher adopted the role of an observer-participant, namely an observer who was present within the social environment being studied with limited involvement while openly identifying themselves as a researcher. This position enabled the researcher to observe participants' interactions and activities naturally without significantly disrupting the social setting. At the same time, reflexivity was continuously maintained throughout the research process by acknowledging the researcher's subjective interpretations, personal assumptions, and potential biases during data collection and analysis. Field notes and reflective memos were used to document the researcher's impressions, positionality, and interactions with participants in order to minimize excessive subjectivity and maintain analytical transparency.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques and Data Analysis

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews served as the primary method for exploring participants' experiences, motivations, perceptions, and decision-making processes regarding padel participation. Interviews were conducted flexibly using open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their experiences and viewpoints freely. The interviews were not limited to a single session but were adapted according to the depth and completeness of the information obtained.

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, meaning that participants' statements were rewritten word-for-word without altering the original meaning of the conversation. In addition, several relevant non-verbal expressions such as pauses, laughter, emphasis, or changes in tone were also documented in brackets to strengthen contextual interpretation during analysis.

The second stage involved data reduction and categorization. At this stage, the researcher selected and simplified data by identifying information relevant to the research focus. Interview transcripts were divided into smaller units of analysis, such as statements or sentences related to health motivation, social influence, lifestyle construction, recreational experiences, and FOMO-related behaviour. Irrelevant information and informal conversations unrelated to the research objectives were excluded to maintain analytical focus.

The third stage involved coding. Coding was conducted by identifying and labeling important concepts, ideas, and recurring meanings emerging from the verbatim transcripts. This study used a systematic coding format based on participant identity, interview sequence, and quotation number. For example, the code [Keisha.W3.Comment67] referred to data obtained from participant Keisha, third interview session, and comment number 67. This coding system facilitated data traceability and ensured consistency throughout the analysis process.

Following coding, the researcher conducted categorization and thematic analysis by grouping codes with similar meanings into broader conceptual categories. From these categories, the researcher identified recurring patterns and developed major themes such as padel as a healthy lifestyle symbol, social self-actualization, recreational escape, and FOMO-driven participation among urban communities. Theme development was conducted iteratively by continuously comparing interview data, observation findings, and supporting documentation to ensure coherence and conceptual consistency.

The final stage involved interpretation and in-depth analysis. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the meanings underlying the identified themes by connecting empirical findings with relevant theories and previous literature. This process aimed to explain the social construction, motivations, and behavioural dynamics underlying participation in padel. The analytical process followed Yin's (2018) explanation-building approach, whereby interpretations were developed progressively based on patterns identified throughout the fieldwork process.

3.4 Data Validity

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation techniques as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2001). Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from multiple sources, including main informants and cross-check informants, as well as through multiple data collection methods such as interviews, observation, and documentation. This approach enabled the researcher to verify the consistency of findings across different contexts and perspectives.

In addition, member checking was also conducted by allowing participants to review interview summaries and interpretations to ensure that the recorded data accurately reflected their experiences and viewpoints. The researcher also maintained reflective field notes throughout the research process to strengthen analytical transparency and reflexivity. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce credible, dependable, and contextually rich findings regarding padel as both a healthy lifestyle practice and a socially driven urban trend associated with FOMO.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

The results of this study describe the main findings regarding the informants' motivations and decision-making processes in taking up padel. Based on in-depth interviews, observations and documentation, it was found that the informants' involvement in padel was driven not only by health considerations, but also by social and economic factors, as well as lifestyle trends emerging

in urban communities. Each informant demonstrated different dynamics in their interpretation of padel, ranging from simply following a trend to making it an activity that is internalised within their daily lives. The following is a description of each informant:

Keysa (Student, 21 years old)

This informant indicated that her initial motivation for taking up padel was driven more by social factors and curiosity about the emerging trend. Her involvement began with an invitation from a friend, without careful planning, and tended to depend on circumstances such as free time, mood, and who else was playing. This suggests that her decision-making process was spontaneous and influenced by her social circle. Furthermore, Keysa also views padel as a social space with a certain symbolic value, particularly in building relationships and self-image. This is reflected in her statement:

“Padel awalnya ikut-ikutan temen, tujuannya nambah temen, atau bahkan dapat pacar atau jodoh. Latihannya juga tergantung jadwal kuliah sama mood, lihat juga siapa yang ikut. Aku juga lihat yang main padel itu kebanyakan anak orang kaya, sampai beli alat-alatnya biar kelihatan keren. Jadi ya ada juga yang buat gengsi sama cari relasi.” [Keysa.W3.Comment 67]

This statement suggests that, for Keysa, padel is not merely seen as a sporting activity, but also as part of a social strategy for building a network.

Yasmin (Housewife, 30 years old)

Unlike Keysa, Yasmin demonstrates a more pragmatic motivation: making use of her free time whilst meeting her need for physical activity. Her involvement in padel began with an invitation from a fellow mother in her child's school community, which subsequently developed into a regular activity. In her decision-making process regarding playing padel, Yasmin considers time efficiency and the convenience of an activity that can be fitted in between her domestic duties. Although she initially joined simply on a whim, she showed a more serious interest by taking part in training sessions with a coach. Nevertheless, the social dimension remains strong, particularly in the practice of sharing her activities on social media. This is reflected in her statement:

“Awalnya ikut-ikutan teman sesama ibu yang anaknya sekolah di tempat yang sama. Sambil nunggu anak sekolah, daripada kosong, ya olahraga. Saya memang suka olahraga, jadi lanjut juga sampai pakai coach. Tapi memang ada juga teman yang cuma ikut buat foto-foto saja, habis itu berhenti.” [Yasmin.W4.Comment 121]

This statement highlights a difference in outlook within the community, between those focused on health and those who are simply following a trend.

Kania (Lecturer, 33 years old)

Kania has a stronger background in the world of sport. Her motivation for getting involved in padel is not only personal but also professional. She sees padel as a business opportunity arising from changing sporting trends in society. Kania's decision-making process regarding playing padel demonstrates a rational approach based on market opportunities. She states that, as it has developed, padel is not merely a sport, but is also utilised for business purposes, purely for entertainment, or even simply to follow trends or due to FOMO. This is what subsequently motivated her to further develop her coaching business from tennis to padel in response to consumer demand. This is reflected in her statement:

“Awalnya saya memang dari tenis, sudah punya komunitas dan juga bisnis latihan. Tapi karena padel lagi tren dan banyak yang tanya latihan padel, akhirnya saya coba kembangkan. Ternyata memang menjanjikan, yang ikut juga kebanyakan dari kalangan menengah ke atas. Tapi memang tidak semua konsisten, ada yang serius olahraga, ada juga yang hanya ikut tren saja.” [Kania.W1.Comment 24]

This statement suggests that padel is viewed not only as a sporting activity, but also as a commodity within the lifestyle industry.

Anwar (Civil Servant, 45 years old)

Meanwhile, Anwar's motivation developed gradually. His involvement in padel began with an invitation from his superior, indicating the influence of social structures in the initial decision-making process. However, over time, this motivation became more personal as he experienced the benefits of the activity. This transformation is reflected in his statement:

"Awalnya saya ikut karena diajak atasan, jadi lebih ke ikut saja. Tapi lama-lama jadi penasaran dan ternyata seru juga. Selain sehat, saya juga jadi punya banyak kenalan dari berbagai profesi, jadi sekarang saya rutin ikut padel." [Anwar.W2.Comment 56]

This statement indicates a shift from external to internal motivation, which reinforces the sustainability of participation in the sport.

Gaisan (Private-sector employee, 37 years old)

Gaisan is a private sector employee in the banking sector; he demonstrates very strong motivation in the instrumental aspect, particularly in building a professional network. He consciously chose padel as a means of expanding his business connections. Economic benefits were the primary consideration in his decision-making process. However, over time, he has also come to appreciate the health benefits of the activity. This is reflected in his statement:

"Saya ikut padel awalnya untuk menambah relasi, karena di perbankan itu penting sekali jaringan. Di lapangan padel ini ketemu banyak orang, dari rekanan bisnis, nasabah sampai calon nasabah. Tapi lama-lama saya juga suka karena sehat. Bahkan kadang keputusan bisnis juga bisa terjadi di lapangan padel." [Gaisan.W5.Comment 167]

This statement indicates that padel serves a broader purpose, not merely as a sport, but also as a space for social and economic interaction.

4.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that participation in padel cannot be understood through a single motivational lens. Rather, it emerges as a dynamic process involving social influence, individual motivation, and behavioural decision-making. Consistent with the conceptual framework developed in this study, the informants' experiences indicate that participation in padel evolves through several interconnected phases, beginning with social exposure and external stimulation, followed by behavioural engagement, and eventually leading to either sustained participation or temporary involvement.

From the perspective of the global growth of padel, the findings support the argument that contemporary sport participation is increasingly embedded within broader lifestyle consumption patterns rather than being driven solely by health considerations. As discussed in the literature, padel has developed as a cultural commodity associated with urban lifestyles, social networking, and symbolic consumption (Deloitte, 2023; FIP, 2023). The experiences of all five informants reveal that padel functions not merely as a physical activity but also as a social arena where identity, status, and interpersonal relationships are negotiated. This finding aligns with sociological perspectives that view modern sport as a medium through which individuals construct and communicate social identities within urban environments.

FOMO as an Initial Trigger Rather than a Sustained Driver

One of the most significant findings concerns the role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in motivating initial participation. Consistent with Suari and Pidada (2025), social media exposure, peer invitations, and the visibility of padel within urban social networks emerged as important

factors influencing first-time participation. However, the findings suggest that FOMO primarily operates as an entry mechanism rather than a long-term driver of involvement.

This pattern is most visible in Keysa's experience. Her decision to participate was largely spontaneous and socially influenced, reflecting the characteristics of FOMO-based behaviour. Her motivation was linked to social belonging, networking opportunities, and symbolic status associated with participation in an activity perceived as popular among affluent urban groups. In terms of Consumer Behaviour Theory, Keysa's need recognition and participation decision were largely stimulated by social influences rather than personal health needs. The evaluation stage appeared limited, resulting in a relatively impulsive decision-making process.

Similarly, Yasmin's initial involvement was triggered by social influence from her peer group. However, unlike Keysa, her participation quickly became associated with practical and health-related considerations. This finding suggests that while FOMO may stimulate initial awareness and curiosity, its influence gradually diminishes once individuals begin evaluating their personal experiences with the activity.

These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of FOMO within sport participation. Rather than functioning as a persistent motivational force, FOMO appears to act as a transitional mechanism that introduces individuals to new sporting experiences. Whether participation continues depends on subsequent motivational processes and the extent to which the activity provides meaningful personal value. Therefore, the present study supports the proposition that FOMO should be conceptualised as a trigger phase within the broader participation trajectory rather than as a stable explanatory factor for sustained engagement.

Motivation Transformation and the Self-Determination Process

A central contribution of this study is the identification of a motivational transformation process that aligns closely with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Across all informants, participation generally began with external motivations but evolved differently depending on individual experiences.

The cases of Anwar and Yasmin provide the clearest examples of this transformation. Both initially participated because of external social influences—an invitation from a superior in Anwar's case and encouragement from fellow mothers in Yasmin's case. However, over time, both individuals reported enjoyment, health benefits, and satisfaction derived from participation itself. This shift reflects movement from externally regulated behaviour toward more autonomous forms of motivation.

From an SDT perspective, this transformation occurred because padel fulfilled the three basic psychological needs proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000). First, autonomy was evident when participants voluntarily chose to continue playing despite the absence of social pressure. Second, competence developed through skill acquisition and performance improvement, particularly among participants who engaged in coaching or regular practice. Third, relatedness emerged through interactions within padel communities and expanded social networks.

The findings therefore support the argument that sustained participation depends less on initial motives and more on the extent to which participation satisfies these psychological needs. Individuals who experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to internalise their motivation and maintain long-term involvement.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation should not be treated as a binary opposition. Instead, motivation exists along a continuum, with

individuals moving between different motivational states throughout their participation journey. This observation reinforces the relevance of SDT in understanding contemporary sport participation, particularly within emerging lifestyle sports such as padel.

Consumer Decision-Making Beyond Rational Choice

The findings also extend understanding of Consumer Behaviour Theory by demonstrating that participation decisions in lifestyle sports are often socially embedded rather than purely rational. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), consumers typically progress through need recognition, information search, evaluation, decision, and post-purchase behaviour. While these stages were evident among participants, the process rarely followed a fully rational sequence. Instead, social influence frequently accelerated or bypassed certain stages.

For example, Keysa and Anwar joined padel almost immediately after receiving invitations from peers. Their decisions involved limited evaluation of alternatives and were strongly influenced by social trust and group norms. This suggests that participation decisions in emerging sports may rely heavily on heuristic rather than rational decision-making processes.

Conversely, Kania and Gaisan demonstrated more strategic forms of decision-making. Kania viewed padel as a business opportunity arising from changing market demand, while Gaisan perceived it as a platform for professional networking. In both cases, participation involved a more deliberate evaluation of potential economic and social benefits. Their experiences illustrate how symbolic and instrumental values can coexist within sport consumption.

These findings support previous arguments that contemporary sport participation often combines functional benefits (health, fitness, recreation) with symbolic benefits (status, networking, identity formation). Consequently, participation in padel represents a form of lifestyle consumption in which social meanings become equally important as physical outcomes.

Padel as a Lifestyle Sport and Urban Identity Formation

Beyond individual motivation, the findings highlight the broader sociological significance of padel as a lifestyle sport. Unlike traditional sports that are primarily evaluated through performance outcomes, lifestyle sports often function as markers of identity, social positioning, and cultural belonging.

This phenomenon is particularly visible in the narratives of Keysa, Kania, and Gaisan. Their accounts suggest that padel serves as a social space where relationships are built, professional opportunities emerge, and symbolic status is communicated. Participation therefore becomes part of a broader process of urban identity construction.

The association between padel and middle-to-upper-class communities further reinforces its symbolic value. Several informants described padel as a sport connected to particular lifestyles, social circles, and economic groups. This perception contributes to the attractiveness of participation, particularly among individuals seeking social integration within specific urban networks.

However, the findings also demonstrate that identity-related motivations do not necessarily undermine health-oriented motivations. Instead, both dimensions frequently coexist. Participants may initially engage because of social visibility or networking opportunities, yet subsequently develop genuine commitments to health, fitness, and personal wellbeing. This overlap challenges the common dichotomy between “healthy lifestyle” and “FOMO-driven behaviour.”

The Dynamic Relationship Between FOMO and Healthy Lifestyle Orientation

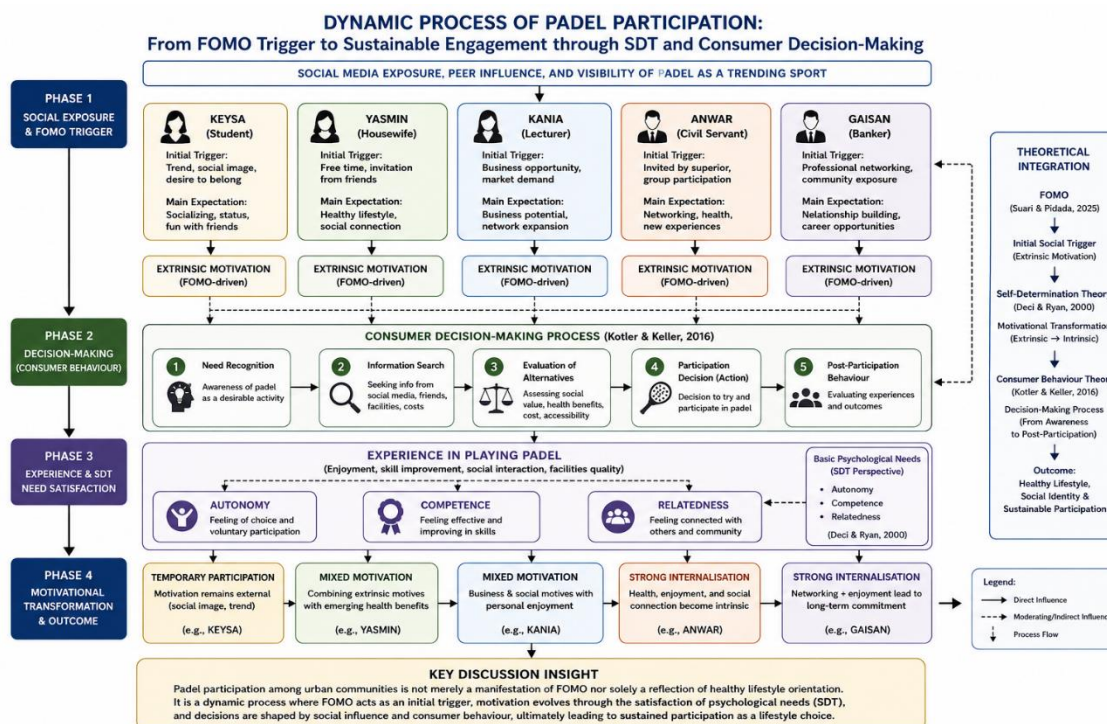
The most important theoretical implication of this study is that FOMO and healthy lifestyle motivations should not be viewed as mutually exclusive categories. Rather, they represent different phases within a dynamic participation process.

The evidence suggests a three-phase trajectory. The first phase involves social exposure and FOMO-based awareness, where participation is stimulated by trends, peer influence, and digital visibility. The second phase involves experiential evaluation, during which participants assess the social, physical, and psychological benefits of the activity. The third phase involves motivational internalisation, where continued participation becomes increasingly driven by intrinsic satisfaction and lifestyle integration.

This trajectory was evident across most informants. Although the initial trigger differed, long-term participation was consistently associated with positive experiences, social connectedness, and perceived health benefits. Consequently, the findings indicate that padel participation among urban communities is neither purely a manifestation of FOMO nor solely a reflection of healthy lifestyle commitment. Instead, it represents an interaction between social influence and motivational development that evolves over time.

Therefore, participation in padel should be understood as a dynamic social process in which trend-driven engagement may transform into sustainable lifestyle behaviour when individuals successfully internalise the value of participation through meaningful experiences and psychological need satisfaction. The following is a summary of the findings from the analysis of the five informants in this study:

Figure 2. The dynamics of the informant’s movements whilst playing padel



Source: Data analysis results

5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that participation in padel among urban communities cannot be adequately explained through a simple dichotomy between healthy lifestyle orientation and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Rather, participation emerges as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between social influence, motivational transformation, and behavioural decision-making. The findings reveal that individuals enter padel through diverse pathways, including social invitations, peer influence, professional networking opportunities, business considerations, and personal health interests. Although these pathways differ, they collectively illustrate that participation in contemporary lifestyle sports is embedded within broader social, cultural, and economic contexts.

A key finding of this study is that FOMO primarily functions as an initial trigger rather than a sustained driver of participation. Exposure to social media content, peer networks, and the growing visibility of padel within urban communities creates awareness and encourages initial engagement. However, continued participation depends less on trend-following behaviour and more on the personal experiences gained through involvement in the sport. As participants experience enjoyment, skill development, social connectedness, and health benefits, their motivations gradually become internalised.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by demonstrating how individuals move from externally regulated participation toward more autonomous forms of motivation. The study shows that sustained engagement occurs when participation satisfies the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. At the same time, the findings enrich Consumer Behaviour Theory by illustrating that participation decisions in emerging lifestyle sports are not always rational and sequential but are frequently influenced by social networks, symbolic meanings, and urban lifestyle aspirations.

More broadly, this study contributes to the growing literature on lifestyle sports by showing that padel functions not only as a form of physical activity but also as a social arena for identity construction, relationship building, and professional networking. Consequently, participation in padel should be understood as a socially embedded process in which health motivations, social aspirations, and symbolic consumption coexist and interact throughout the participation journey.

Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for stakeholders involved in sport development and physical activity promotion in urban Indonesia. For sport facility operators and padel club managers, the findings suggest that successful participant retention should not rely solely on the popularity of the sport or social media trends. While FOMO may attract first-time participants, long-term engagement is more likely to be achieved through creating positive participant experiences that foster skill development, social interaction, and a sense of community. Programmes such as beginner coaching sessions, community tournaments, and social networking events may help facilitate the transition from externally motivated participation to sustained involvement.

For community health practitioners and public health organisations, the findings indicate that emerging lifestyle sports can serve as effective entry points for increasing physical activity participation among urban populations. Rather than viewing trend-driven participation negatively, health promotion strategies may utilise popular sports such as padel as gateways to healthier and more active lifestyles. Encouraging participation through social networks and

community-based programmes may be particularly effective in reaching groups who are otherwise less engaged in regular physical activity.

For policymakers, the study highlights the importance of recognising lifestyle sports as part of contemporary urban sport ecosystems. Policies aimed at increasing physical activity participation should not focus exclusively on traditional sports but also consider emerging recreational sports that resonate with the interests and lifestyles of urban communities. Supporting accessible sport infrastructure, community-based recreation programmes, and inclusive sporting environments may contribute to broader public health objectives while accommodating changing patterns of sport consumption.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on a small number of participants and therefore reflect in-depth individual experiences rather than statistically generalisable patterns. Second, the study focuses primarily on urban participants who are already involved in padel, which may limit understanding of perceptions among non-participants or individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Future research should therefore expand this line of inquiry in several directions. Quantitative studies involving larger samples could examine the relative prevalence of FOMO-driven and health-driven motivations among padel participants and test the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework developed in this study. Such studies could empirically assess the extent to which FOMO, intrinsic motivation, and psychological need satisfaction influence participation frequency and long-term commitment.

Comparative studies across different cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Bali, and other emerging padel markets, would also provide valuable insights into how local socio-cultural contexts shape participation patterns. Furthermore, longitudinal research is needed to examine how motivations evolve over time and whether participants who initially engage because of FOMO remain involved once the popularity of the sport stabilises.

Finally, future studies could compare padel with other emerging lifestyle sports to better understand how social identity formation, symbolic consumption, and health motivations interact across different sporting contexts. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary sport participation in rapidly urbanising societies.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that padel participation among urban communities represents neither a purely healthy lifestyle choice nor merely a manifestation of FOMO. Instead, it reflects a dynamic process through which social influences initiate participation, personal experiences transform motivation, and meaningful engagement ultimately shapes the development of sustainable sporting lifestyles.

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