

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT: A CAUSE FOR FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO)?

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Social media, a relatively recent phenomenon, fosters active participation and diverse opinions among users, facilitating increased connection and engagement within the online community. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is characterized by an intense desire to stay continuously informed about others' activities, coupled with an uneasy sense of potentially missing out on experiences. Studies indicate that FoMO significantly predicts adverse outcomes from excessive social media use. Thus, the present research aimed to i) explore the influence of social media usage on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among college students and ii) examine gender differences in FoMO and social media utilization. The findings revealed a robust correlation between FoMO and social media activity, with the latter emerging as a significant predictor of the former. Furthermore, noteworthy gender differences were observed in both FoMO and social media engagement.

Keywords: Social Media, FoMO, Social Media Engagement, Gender Difference

Introduction

The digital landscape has introduced a myriad of psychological implications, with a growing focus on the impact of extensive social media use on users' personalities and behaviors (Singh et al., 2013). Among the outcomes associated with social media engagement (SME), the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) stands out as a noteworthy phenomenon. Recognizing

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this, the present study delves into the intricate relationship between social media participation and FoMO.

A comprehensive exploration is undertaken, spurred by the notable gender gap identified in a JWT Intelligence analysis from 2012. This analysis found that males exhibited heightened levels of both FoMO and social media participation. Intriguingly, the existing body of research lacks sufficient exploration of gender differences in FoMO and social media involvement, underscoring the need for a nuanced investigation in this domain. Through this study, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the evolving discourse on the intersection of social media, gender, and the pervasive Fear of Missing Out.

Social Media Engagement

The advent of the internet and social media stands as the defining transformation in the contemporary world, ushering in a two-way communication platform that profoundly shapes our social interactions. The ubiquitous presence of smartphones as the primary gateway to online access has led to an exponential surge in social media usage, offering limitless possibilities for virtual connections. In this dynamic landscape, terms like “like,” “follow,” “subscribe,” and “tweet” have become the lexicon of modern interpersonal communication (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010).

Social media serves various purposes for individuals, providing diverse opportunities for user satisfaction on different platforms (Abel et al., 2016). This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between social media participation and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), especially considering the gender disparities identified in a 2012 JWT Intelligence analysis, which highlighted heightened FoMO and social media participation among males.

To understand this dynamic landscape, it is crucial to define social media engagement as the act of a user utilizing social media for communication or interaction. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described social media as a group of internet-based applications allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Kietzmann et al. (2011) further presented a honeycomb architecture, defining seven functional building blocks, including identification, dialogues, sharing, presence, connections, reputation, and groups, which constitute the ecology of social media.

DiGangi and Wasko (2016) contributed four dimensions—personalization, social accessibility, perceived risk, and transparency—as foundational aspects of social engagement. They found that social media engagement directly correlates with perceived social accessibility and personalization while inversely correlated with perceived risk and transparency.

Engagement in social media has been characterized diversely, ranging from a category of user experience (O'Brien & Toms, 2008) to a blend of psychological and behavioral components (Lehmann et al., 2012). Ray et al. (2014) defined social media engagement as a holistic psychological state wherein individuals are cognitively and emotionally energized to behave in ways that align with positive group perceptions.

DiGangi and Wasko (2016) delve into the technological features influencing social media engagement, including completeness, flexibility, integration, and evolvability (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Wixom and Todd (2005, as referenced in DiGangi & Wasko, 2016), completeness reflects the perceived capacity for precise interaction, flexibility pertains to innovative approaches in utilizing social media features, evolvability signifies a platform's adaptability to user expectations, and integration measures the blending of diverse information sources.

The seven functional building blocks, the four dimensions, and the four technological features collectively shape social media engagement, impacting how users interact in the virtual realm and providing a framework to measure the level of engagement among users.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

In a world dominated by social media, the habitual act of aimlessly scrolling through platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube has become a common occurrence. Yet, what if this seemingly innocuous activity gave rise to a phobia known as the “Fear of Missing Out,” or FoMO? Imagine a scenario where you and your friends are planning a night out on social media, but due to the lack of internet access and unreturned calls, you find yourself excluded from the planning process. The anxiety mounts as you fear missing out on the fun others are presumably having. This fear, as described by Andrew K. Przybylski (Przybylski et al., 2013), is a relatively new

concept, although the inherent worry about missing out has existed in human nature and society, albeit less prominently and introspectively (Becker, 2014).

FoMO, characterized as social anxiety with a constant “desire to stay continuously connected with what others are doing” (Przybylski et al., 2013), is defined as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al., 2013). The term FoMO was coined by Dan Herman, who also credits Patrick James McGinnis for introducing the related concept of FoBO (Fear of Better Option) and exploring their roles in society (Herman, 2000).

Herman (2010) contends that the initial stage of FoMO involves individuals being presented with an endless array of virtual possibilities. Once these options are recognized, individuals use their perceived capacity to explore all potential avenues. When the perceived ability falls short of those in their physical or virtual circles (though connected virtually), and this realization manifests as fear, anxiety, or stress, it marks the onset of FoMO (Herman, 2010).

The consequences of FoMO are diverse, encompassing potential feelings of sadness, perceived depression, a sour mood, and overall dissatisfaction (Przybylski et al., 2013). These effects stem from the notion that an individual did not make the optimal choice and missed out on a valuable opportunity (ibid). In understanding the evolution of FoMO and its psychological underpinnings, it becomes apparent that this modern phobia has deep roots in the virtual landscapes we navigate daily.

Social Media Engagement and FoMO

Numerous studies have explored the intricate relationship between social media engagement and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Unlike previous one-way communication systems, contemporary social media serves as a dynamic two-way platform, providing users unprecedented opportunities for communication and interaction (Yolmo, 2014). The association between social media involvement and FoMO finds substantial support in the uses and rewards hypothesis, which delves into how individuals select and utilize media to fulfill their specific needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962).

Traditionally, media consumption was believed to be a passive acceptance of what was offered. However, the uses and satisfaction hypothesis challenges this notion, portraying media consumers as active participants who actively seek out and employ various media platforms and content for enjoyment

(Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013). Technological advancements have significantly expanded consumers' options, particularly with the rise of social media and networking sites, allowing users to pick and choose content from anywhere at any time (Strafford, Straffors, & Schkade, 2004).

According to the user and gratification theory proposed by DiGangi & Wasko (2016), social media engagement can be classified based on users' needs for gratification. These needs include:

i) Entertainment: Social media provides a source of fun, escapism, and emotional freedom, with increased entertainment value contributing to higher user satisfaction and engagement (Chung & Austria, 2010).

ii) Searching and Sharing of Information: The internet's constant availability of information and the ability to exchange information globally enhance user satisfaction and boost participation in social media (Maddox, 1998).

iii) Social Interaction & Relational: Connecting socially through various platforms has become a crucial reason for users to engage with the internet, surpassing the earlier emphasis on information access (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

iv) Rewards/Remuneration: Some social media platforms offer rewards, including monetary compensation, which enhances usability and increases social media participation.

Further, self-determination theory, as suggested by Przybylski et al. (2013), provides a useful framework for understanding FoMO. They identify competence, autonomy, and relatedness as fundamental psychological prerequisites for satisfaction and characterize FoMO as a mediator arising from inadequacies in psychological needs. FoMO acts as a self-regulatory mechanism, prompting users to spend more time on social media to fulfill their psychological needs (Przybylski et al., 2013).

The Present Research

The escalating concern of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in the realm of mental health issues, particularly among millennials engrossed in social media, is a growing apprehension. Renowned for their adept multitasking skills and technological adaptability, millennials leverage social media for information access and connecting with family and friends. While social

media engagement offers undeniable benefits for this generation, there are evident drawbacks. The time and attention invested in online activities contribute to heightened perceived stress, escalating the risk of depression, anxiety, and FoMO (Alt, 2015).

Given these considerations, it becomes imperative to scrutinize whether millennials display excessive social media usage and whether it manifests detrimental impacts on their mental health, notably in triggering FoMO. The primary objective of the current study is to explore the relationship between FoMO and social media engagement. Additionally, the study aims to establish social media engagement as a predictor of FoMO, providing a theoretical framework that sheds light on these concepts both independently and in relation to each other. The investigation also extends to scrutinizing potential gender variations in these factors.

Notably, this study, which was conducted in India, adds to the effort to examine the correlation between social media involvement and FoMO in different cultural environments. Anticipations rested on the assumption of a positive link between social media participation and FoMO, positing that the pleasure derived from social media satisfies diverse needs. The second hypothesis drew from earlier research suggesting a gender disparity in FoMO, with males exhibiting higher levels (Przybylski et al., 2013; JWT Intelligence, 2012). Consequently, the study postulates that males would demonstrate higher levels of FoMO compared to females.

Methodology

Participants

Adolescents were taken as the sample for the current study. The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Media Engagement Scales were given to 136 late adolescents (Males = 69, Female=67) falling in the age range of 17-22 years. Data were collected from undergraduate students studying different subjects in colleges in North Bengal, India. Having obtained consent from the participants, they were asked to fill out the Social Media Engagement Scale, followed by the FoMO scale. The data was collected in small groups of 10-12 participants per group in a classroom setting.

Measures

Participants were asked to fill up a questionnaire that contained scales for FoMO and social media engagement developed by Abel, Buff, and Burr (2016). These scales are different from the FoMO and social media

engagement scales developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) in the sense that the scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) was more of a situation-based scale, whereas Abel, Buff and Burr (2016) developed a scale that was more apt for measuring psychologically based FoMO (Abel, Buff and Burr, 2016). All the items were assessed using a 7-point Likert Scale, with different attribution given to different points for different scales (9 items for the Social Media Engagement scale and 10 items for the FoMO scale).

Procedure

The participants were taken from various colleges in North Bengal, India. Before the questionnaires were handed out, the participants were given a brief overview of the study, and informed consent was obtained, after which they were asked to complete the questionnaires on Social Media Engagement and FoMO in a classroom setting.

Results

A bivariate analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between FoMO and social media engagement. Results displayed a positive correlation between these two variables ($r=0.25$, $p<.05$). Further, regression analysis suggested that social media engagement significantly influenced FoMO ($\beta = 0.21$, $t=2.96$, $p<0.005$), which implies that social media engagement is significantly predicting FoMO.

Table 1. Correlation of Social Media Engagement with FOMO

<i>Measures</i>	<i>FoMO</i>
Social Media Engagement (SME)	0.248**

** $p<0.01$

Table 2. Regression Analysis of Social Media Engagement with FOMO

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>FoMO</i>
Social Media Engagement (SME)	0.208*(0.07)

* $p<0.05$

A test of mean difference was carried out to test the second hypothesis, that is, to identify gender differences in social media engagement and FoMO. Analysis of the gender difference (t-test) showed significant gender differences in both FoMO and Social Media Engagement, with females displaying higher FoMO as well as Social Media Engagement ($t= -3.49$, $p<.05$, $t= -2.65$, $p<.01$),

which is contradictory to our second hypothesis.

Table 3. Gender Difference in Social Media Engagement and FoMO

<i>Measures</i>	<i>Male M (SD)</i>	<i>Female F (SD)</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Social Media Engagement (SME)	24.35 (8.35)	30.41 (8.95)	-3.49**
FoMO	29.61 (8.75)	34.02 (7.72)	-2.65**

**p<0.01

Discussion

In this comprehensive study, our focus was on examining the impact of social media use on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among teenagers in India. The results unveiled a significant and positive correlation between social media involvement and FoMO, aligning with previous research conducted in Western contexts (Gezgin et al., 2017; Przybylski et al., 2013). This correlation is attributable to the contemporary reliance of teenagers on social media platforms, serving as crucial outlets for information dissemination. The fear of disengagement emanates from the potential loss of information, ranging from basic details like birthdays to more nuanced content. Notably, the study found that high social media participation is linked to increased emotional support from friends, echoing Putnam's (2000) and Alt's (2015) perspectives. Moreover, the study indicates that FoMO is predicted by social media involvement, implying an inverse correlation between FoMO and social media participation.

A gender analysis revealed that females exhibit a higher frequency of FoMO and engage in social media more extensively. This contradicts findings from previous studies, including one conducted in a different cultural context where males displayed significant levels of internet addiction and FoMO (Gedam et al., 2017; Przybylski et al., 2013; JWT Intelligence, 2012). This unexpected result suggests a unique relationship between gender and FoMO in the Indian context, potentially influenced by the predominantly male-dominated culture. Social media emerges as a platform providing women with the opportunity to openly express and discuss their ideas, resulting in more frequent engagement and higher FoMO rates.

While this study brings fresh insights into the design of FoMO, it is not without limitations. Primarily, the research is confined to a specific region with unique characteristics, warranting caution in generalizing the findings to the entire nation. Future studies should encompass a broader geographical scope

to enhance the external validity of the results, given India's diverse cultural landscape. Additionally, reliance on self-reports for data collection introduces a potential bias, and future research should employ multiple methodologies to corroborate and strengthen the study's conclusions. Moreover, the study did not consider additional factors that could potentially influence the link between social media involvement and FoMO, highlighting the need for future investigations to explore mediators and correlates of these constructs.

Despite these limitations, the study significantly contributes to our understanding of the relationship between social media involvement and FoMO, shedding light on a novel gender difference in FoMO within the Indian cultural context. The findings suggest potential risks associated with pathological internet use among teenagers, emphasizing the need for future research to explore the adverse effects linked to these constructs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study significantly contributes to the discourse on the relationship between social media participation and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). The robust positive association revealed through regression analysis underscores the impact of increased social media use on higher FoMO levels. Notably, our focus was on the time spent engaging in social media interactions, leaving the precise nature of these interactions unexplored. Future research endeavours should delve deeper into the qualitative aspects of user engagement to elucidate whether the impact on FoMO is solely contingent on time spent or influenced by the specific nature of the interactions.

It is crucial to recognize social media as a versatile tool whose impact is contingent on individual usage patterns. While our study affirms that the duration of social media engagement does influence FoMO, a qualitative exploration of users' psychology and personality traits is warranted. A comprehensive qualitative study can unravel the intricate interplay of these factors, providing a nuanced understanding of the other elements influencing or causing FoMO.

Furthermore, our study unveils a gender disparity in both social media participation and FoMO, with females exhibiting higher levels in both dimensions. This finding diverges from previous research, necessitating future investigations to unravel the underlying reasons behind females increased social media usage and heightened risk of developing FoMO. Questions regarding age-group specificity, regional variations, and the generalizability of these findings across diverse demographics merit exploration. A comparative

investigation into these nuances would significantly contribute to the literature, enriching our understanding of the complex dynamics between gender, social media engagement, and FoMO.

In essence, this study serves as a foundation, setting the stage for future research endeavors to deepen our understanding of social media involvement and its nuanced impact on FoMO. The multifaceted nature of these relationships calls for continued exploration, providing valuable insights into the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions shaping individuals' experiences in the digital age.

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