

Influential Habitual Social Media Practices of Digital Technology (Social Media) Prompting the Concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among Youngsters

Dr. Abdullah Alfazeena^{1*} and Dr. K. Manikkam²

^{1&2}Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Communication, Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore – 641028, Tamil Nadu, India.

^{1*}alf41994@gmail.com , ²kmanikkam08@gmail.com

Abstract

The booming social media habitat has tremendously influenced users of all ages by altering their ideas, thoughts, and behaviours toward themselves and others (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Continuous occurrence of such influential practices leads social media users to equip the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This concept deals with the 'fear of losing something' because of their decreased involvement. FoMO has psychologically impacted social media users to experience a sense of "... irritability, anxiety, and inadequacy", while they restrain themselves from their habitual social media practices (Wortham, 2011).

Similarly, the theory of practice suggested by Pierre Bourdieu (1994) illustrates the habitual imposition of certain cultures, which has adverse effects on humans' everyday practices. Social media usage has transformed into social media culture, insisting that the 'power field' be explored through anthropological practices.

This research study aims to explore the social media practices among young adolescents, who equip FoMO with continuous involvement. Study utilises Qualitative In-Depth Interviews conducted among ten youngsters. Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is underpinned within this study to develop an efficient theoretical and conceptual framework.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out, Social Media Practice, Influential Practice, and Habitual Practice.*

1. Fear of Missing Out and Social Media Habits

Social media has become an essential component of our daily lives. Billions of people around the world use social media to stay in touch with friends and family, share information, and express themselves. This platform has also had a significant impact on society, altering the way we communicate, study, and engage with the world around us. Virtual platforms have integrated within our lives, influencing our decision making and social behaviours. *The Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO) deals with the social anxiety caused by the social platforms, when users miss out certain information. There remains an underlying pathological connection between *social anxiety* and *depression* mediated through several cognitive factors that urges individuals expectations in *social networking* (Wegmann et al., 2015). The theory of FoMo explores the *pervasive nature* of society in attaining *rewarding experience* by being *continually connected* (Przybylski et al., 2013). Social media users with high FoMO possess the ability to experience *a fear of social absence* resulting in *social anxiety* and *social depression*.

Individuals with *lower degree* of social interactions are more tempted to engage with FoMO in social media, as they feel more connected virtually rather than socially in a real environment. Such connectedness encourages social media users to experience a *cognitive satisfaction* that builds into *self-gratification* (Alutaybi et al., 2020). FoMO typically concentrates on the *preoccupation* of social media users being unable to tolerate the *loss of connection*, while being disconnected from the social platforms. On the other hand this *social media practice* can be defined using Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) *Theory of Practice*, which features the digital age from an anthropological and sociological aspect. The distinctive perspective of this theory addresses the concept of *habitus*, which is composed of several *social rules, values and conventions* structured by the society to guide and represent an individual in a social space (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). *Social Media Space* is observed as a *power field* due to its intersecting ability. *FoMo* displays a *persuasive* and *apprehensive* rewarding experience for being virtually present (Przybylski et al., 2013).

The emergence of *FoMo* as a theory began with the concept of *Self Determination Theory* (STD) formulated by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, 2000. This theory was conceptualised by Przybylski et al to evaluate and deploy *FoMo*. *Self Determination Theory* (STD) encouraged more on positive mental health, driving social relatedness into intrinsic motivation. The *FoMo* arose as a contradictory theory of STD, as it explores the negative emotion rather than the positive mental health. This psychological phenomenon of *FoMo*, "...exists as an episodic feeling that occurs in mid-conversation...", where consequences would become a long-term mental deposition transforming slowly into a particular state of mind (Zaslove, 2015). Individuals who experience this episodic feeling shall psychologically be pushed into a state of mental anxiety that in turn results in inferiority, depression and loneliness. *FoMo* process through a two step aspect beginning from the *perception of missing out*, leading towards behavioural change termed as *compulsive behaviour*.

This sort of *compulsive behaviour* occurs as a need to maintain social connections, which is further postulated to relatedness. Relatedness or being related is mentioned as *the need for belongingness*, to form a strong and stable relationship. Several scientific studies consider *FoMO* as a negative scale that helps in mapping *cognitive anxiety, behavioural strategy* which together results in *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)* (Elhai, 2021).

2. Embedding Theory of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) *Theory of Practice* functions as a thought tool in exploring complicated and subtle societal structure and relationships that exist within societies, which also transforms into different individual's practices. Similarly, social media has also created a pattern of practice among its users, where they are independent to follow algorithmic structures and social relationships. This theory pays an empirical way to explore and understand the core aspect of experiencing *FoMO* through users' social media practices. *Theory of Practice* introduces the concept of *habitus, incorporation of structures and symbolic capital*. Primary core of this theory revolves around the concept of *habitus*, as it is interlinked with human habits and lifestyle. This theory acts as a secondary framework in tracing human action through certain behavioural structures and patterns. It also assists in creating a picture of human socialisation through the disposition and embodiment shaped by individual's perception and action.

The aspect of disposition is acquired from the individual's existing preferences and way of thinking. Similarly, the disposition of *habitus* emphasises more on "...embodiment of knowledge, skills, and practical senses..." possessed by the individuals within their social contexts (Andrew et al., 1980). Social media also plays a part in creating such *socialising space* for the users to perceive and behave accordingly, which creates the formation of new habits. Further they are also shaped by the social levels such as class, educational background and culture. The level acquired by *habitus formation* operates at a pre-reflective phase, which influences every users choices and behaviours without conscious awareness (Andrew et.al., 1980). This unconscious framework limits the user's understanding and exposure within the social environment (social media), influencing their cognitive activity of thoughts, action and decision making. *Habitus* provides a theoretical framework that helps in understanding the ways in which individuals internalise and reproduce social norms or practices in their own acceptable method.

This research study uncovers the emerging trend of FoMo among young people, focusing on the causes of this phenomenon in the use of social networks. The main theoretical framework used in this study is based on the research conducted by Andrew K. Przybylski, Kou Murayama, Cody R. DeHaan, and Valerie Gladwell (2013) who analyzed the concept of *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)* in detail.

This primary theory is complemented by the integration of Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) *Theory of Practice* as a secondary theoretical lens, which adds depth to the socio-cultural dynamics under study. The sample of this study are the youth of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, among which ten participants were interviewed, constituting an important element of the qualitative method. This study aims to understand the complex nexus between the ubiquity of social media and the emergence of FoMo among these people. The study is based on the Przybylski et al.'s comprehensive understanding of FoMo and seeks to reveal the subtle mechanisms through which the *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO) influences the behavior, attitudes, and mental health of the youngsters in the digital realm.

Przybylski et al.'s study has formed the theoretical framework underpinning the psychological aspects of FoMo, describing it as a source of anxiety, low life satisfaction, and the need to be in touch in cyberspace. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice integration enhances the analysis through which the social media practices of these individuals become habitus. The qualitative interviews conducted among the ten youth of Coimbatore helps to understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms relating to FoMo. It also aims at understanding the role that social media practices play in the creation of FOMO and the strategies employed by these individuals in dealing with the intricacies of online sociality in relation to their socio-cultural environment. This study attempts to present a comprehensive exploration on the emergence and revolution of *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO) rooted within the habitats and cognitive practices of the social media users, providing intricate understanding of the subconscious interplay between individuals and social media environment.

3. Similar Studies

Social Media Practices generate innate drive among the individuals to experience the *sense of belonging* that dictates and dominates their social behaviour within the social media platforms. This aspect is well examined in the research study "The Social Media Party: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Intensity, Connection, and Well-Being" conducted by James A. Roberts and Meredith E. David (2019). Positive indirect effects of *FoMO* were explored in two batches. The study 1 was conducted on 107 college students to investigate their intensity of *social media practice* and *social connection*. While the study 2 was conducted on 458 college students to explore their subjective well-being during the *social media connection*. The study resulted in *positive FoMO* among most of the samples. Well-being of the students were linked directly (negative) and indirectly (positive) through *FoMO* in being socially connected.

The apprehension of being always connected in social media platforms has been a part of *timely fashion*, giving birth to FoMo related anxiety, disturbed sleep, over dependence on social media and lack of real life connection among the social media users. The detailed study "Combating Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on Social Media:

The FoMO-R Method” published by Aarif Alutaybi, Dena Al-Thani, John McAlaney and Raian Ali (2020) statistically measured the *self control, anxiety management, compulsive behaviour, uncertainty avoidance, attribution and resilience* of 30 samples. The study utilised mixed-methodology to explore different types of *FoMO* and suggested that *FoMO*'s negative impact can be reduced using socio-technical approach (combining social skill and technical skill) with adequate literacy. A positive *FoMO* does not cause social or cognitive impact among the social media users, while negative *FoMO* can result in mild to average *habitual* changes among the users.

Gabe Ignatow and Laura Robinson (2017) studies in depth the concept of Pierre Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (1994) in their article, “Pierre Bourdieu: theorizing the digital”. The concept of *digital sociology* was more featured throughout the study. Social impacts of Digital Communication Technologies and the application of the same was reviewed by Ignatow and Robinson underpinning the theory of practice. Bourdieu figured a link between the *real and relational*, which was used to categorise various social phenomena using social structures and mental structures (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These social and mental structures seemed to be entangled within *students' aesthetic preferences* and had an impact among their *academic performances*. The immediate rise in *digitally mediated communication technology* has resulted in framing a *new realm* of reality and relationship for the individuals to explore. Such exploration would definitely *reframe* their *regular habitus* creating new sets of *daily rituals*.

The Quantitative study “Social Media and Social Class” by Simeon Yates (2018) uses the *Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1994) as a base to study the relationship between social class and social media usage, examining the social, economic and cultural capitals within the social media. This study draws out the fact that the maximum number of social media users arise from lower socioeconomic communities, concluding with the statement that social media usage directly corresponds to the users socio-cultural and economic status distinguished by their own social systems.

4. Theoretical Approach

The entire research functions around the theoretical framework of Andrew K. Przybylski, Kou Murayama, Cody R. DeHaan and Valerie Gladwell's (2013) *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO) and secondary theory of Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) *Theory of Practice*. The primary framework utilises the *FoMO* structure the data analytical parameters and the secondary framework uses the *Theory of Practice* to frame the methodological parameters. The parameters includes *perception of missing out, compulsive behavior* and *need of belongingness*.

Qualitative research approach was integrated within this study to explore the *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)* experienced by the younger generation through social media. This study requires more personal interactions to understand and evaluate the

influence and effect of *FoMO*. Interviews were conducted on ten participants randomly sampled in Coimbatore. The chosen participants were interviewed using scheduled questionnaires based on their social media practices. The participants under the *Young Adult* category falling between 18 years to 25 years are chosen for this study.

4.1. Research Question:

These are the set of questions projected by the researchers to seek out essential answers.

1. What is the *perception of missing out* experienced by the participants while they are unconsciously and consciously disconnected from social media?
2. Do the participants involve in any *compulsive behaviour*, to maintain their social connections?
3. What are the social and psychological *need of belongingness* personally experienced by the participants?

4.2. Research Objectives:

The primary and secondary focus of the study are jotted as research objectives, with the intention to find a solution for them through underpinned theoretical approaches.

1. To identify whether the participants have consciously altered their social behaviours to accomplish social connection within the social media.
2. To examine the level of psychological fears associated with *FoMO* while being disconnected from their social media practices.
3. To understand the unconscious impact of social media practices leading to *FoMO* among the younger participants.

5. Interview Analysis

The collected data accounts for ten audio recordings of 10 participants with 5 female and 5 male. Each of the interviews lasted for minimum 15 minutes and maximum 40 minutes. Interview questions addressed the three main objectives of the study in different manner, with the intention of generating a personal interaction between the researchers and participants.

5.1 Perception of Missing Out

This component deals with the *social exclusion* experienced by the social media users, when they miss certain information or contents within the social media. The *Perception of Missing Out* was clearly visible among eight of the participants, as they felt the sense of being *left-behind* when they miss certain social media information. This *FoMO* impacts their psychological behaviour to urge themselves to catch-up with the missed information within the next 1-2 days. The missed information could be a story or status, news feed, reels or videos etc.

Few of the participants have put themselves into *sleep deprivation* in order to complete their task of *catching-up* with the rest of the social media users.

Mostly, male participants have felt the severe *psychological compulsion* to be engaged continuously within the social media, as they wanted to be first to react or troll a social media story or post. While female participants exposed fewer *psychological compulsions* as they focus more on competing with the other social media users by being the first one to post a story or post that is on trend. The continuous experience of *Perception of Missing Out* could lead to social depression and social anxiety with time (Gupta and Sharma, 2021).

Perception of Missing Out being the central field of *FoMO* also insists on the anxiety and uneasy feeling the participants felt, while being disconnected from social media. The eight participants often felt a sudden rise in *fear* as they strongly felt that their *active participation* in social media was *self-gratifying*. The aspect of *perception of missing out* were affected by several factors that includes *Social Comparison*, *Fear of Regret*, *Desire for Social Inclusion* and *Decision Paralysis* (Mulvey et al., 2017).

Social Comparison opens the gate for the participants to compare themselves with their peer fellows in terms of social media platform usage and information seeking, which leads towards *Fear of Regret*. This component of *Fear of Regret* induces the participants with an intensive psychological regret, as they have missed their opportunity to seek information from social media and to keep up with the other social media users. The collaborative effect of *Social Comparison* and *Fear of Regret* resulted in *Decision Paralysis*. Only a fewer level *Decision Paralysis* was experienced by the eight participants. As it requires the participants to be more addicted towards social media engagement. But a minimal amount of *Decision Paralysis* can be found among the participants, as they experience anxiety while making a social decision within the social media, from choosing an appropriate filter to adding the right audio track to their story. The participants felt fear of making wrong choices in social media leading towards initial stages of *Decision Paralysis*.

5.2 Compulsive Behaviour

This component of *FoMO* deals with the vicious cycle of rechecking their social media platforms frequently and engaging continuously within the platform to maintain social connections. Such frequent habitat inhibits the individuals real behaviour by resulting in *Compulsive Behaviour*. Majority of the female participants were more engaged in possessing *compulsive behaviour* in comparison to male participants. Five of female participants and three of male participants exhibited significant *Compulsive Behaviour* referring to the urge to act or react in social media, driven by *FoMO*. The social media contents seek a much greater position among the social media users, giving it a significant value in their social and personal life, which reflect in the users psychological, cultural and economical life.

The eight participants have experienced the manifestation of *compulsive behaviour* in several aspects, which has induced their *Social Media Commitment, Frequent Presence, Constant Reaction, Unable to Disconnect* and *Continuous Restlessness* (Alutaybi et al., 2020). Male and female participants have equally *over-engaged* in social media in the advent of FoMO. They have begun to *lose track of time* and experienced *lack of commitment* in real life, while being *overcommitted* within social media. Their search for constant reels and notifications create a new set of habitats *altering their relationship with reality*. While the urge for being *Frequently Present* and *Reacting Constantly* to all the social media notifications have also become a *compulsive behaviour* adding on to their *inability to feel disconnected* from the social media resulting in *restlessness* and *uneasiness*. These participants could not imagine themselves being offline or deactivating their social media account even for a day. This aspect of *FoMO* also increases the stable belief among the participants creating a negative impact on their emotional control leading towards *fear of social rejection*.

5.3 Need of Belongingness

This component of *FoMO* creates an *emotional desire* to maintain an *undefined relationship* between the user and social media. All the ten participants consciously and unconsciously desire for the *need of belonging* in social media. They act and engage with the desire to *taste the sense of belongingness*. It has become an intrinsic part of social media users while they develop *FoMO*, which is linked deeply psychologically and emotionally for the well being of the individual's real life. The subcomponents of *Need of Belongingness* includes *Emotional Validation, Fear of being excluded, Social Identify* and *Decreased Uncertainty*.

Emotional Validation is identified as the need for *emotional support* sought through social media, when the participants emotions are accepted and understood. To enhance the *Emotional Validation*, the participants react to a social media content based on their instinct. Where, they emotionally suppress or over-express themselves, imitating the other social media users. This can be seen, when a social media hashtag or reel content goes viral, as users start to imitate and recreate the same. Similarly, the *Fear of Exclusion* arises when the social media users couldn't engage in the recreational activity of maintaining the viral process. The participants psychologically feel that they will be socially isolated from the *trend*, making them disliked among the social media groups and communities.

Need of Belongingness also creates a space for the participants to form a new *social identity* altering their demographic and personal data, creating a new acceptable *social identity*. All participants have at least altered their real identity by having fancy names and filtered posts. This *sense of acceptance* has *decreased the uncertainty* issues among the participants, as they feel safe to remain within an acceptable social media group following the community's social norms and gratifying its expectations.

6. Conclusion

The younger generation are definitely undergoing *FoMO* unconsciously as they possess its components in a discrete manner. Most of their anxiety and negative mindedness arise from the severe impact of *FoMO*, which has resulted in undetected behavioural, psychological, sociological and cultural changes. The participants have definitely modified and changed their real attitude and behaviours to become socially acceptable in the social media platforms. This has led them to form new sets of habitats that includes *Extreme Social Media Commitment, Frequent Online Presence, Constant Reaction to Social Media Posts, Unable to Disconnect from Social Media* and *Continuous Restlessness* when being unable to live within the social media. Such habitual changes have altered their real life and their connection with reality, as they are more into social media than personal or social life.

The levels of fear are unmeasurable as every participant has a sense of *FoMO* to deactivate or even be disconnected from social media for a day. Their highest level of fear includes *Fear of Exclusion, Fear of Rejection* and *Emotional Validation*. All the participants strive extremely within social media to overcome these three levels of psychological fears, as they want to feel *Socially Acceptable*. This social media acceptance creates *an euphoric feeling* among the participants to taste *the sense and need of belongingness*.

Such continuous experience of *FoMO* among the youngsters would result in several psychological and cognitive problems unconsciously. As most of the participants have begun to experience psychological issues such as *sleep deprivation, social isolation, social anxiety, habitual changes, need for acceptance and restlessness*. Longer exposure to these psychological experiences can lead to *depression* and *complete disconnection* from the real world. All the social media users must create a *line of limitation* between their real life and social media. Only such *limitations* can save the social media generation from the severe impacts of *FoMO* psychologically and cognitively. The need for *validation* must be broken by the social media users to *set themselves free from the chains of social media FoMO*.

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