

Exploring fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among students during COVID-19 pandemic at university level

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This qualitative research aims to explore how students in a single autonomous institution of Sargodha were affected by FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). It was common during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has been characterized as "a constant fear that others may be experiencing gratifying experiences that one is losing out on that one is missing out on". Six students were interviewed one-on-one in semi-structured interviews from the first and third semesters. It showed that during COVID-19, students had surprising grassroots support systems that were mostly isolated from one another, such as their fellow students in university. They missed events with peers and fellows and remain confused during pandemic but the significance of social media also added in fear of missing out due to its use during COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers recommend that students should be taught how to manage the situation emotionally when confronted with crises. Students in higher education, as well as people of all ages, could benefit from resilience-building programs. One of the most effective ways for students is to cope with the problems that have a strong sense of self and who is positive and resilient in such type of situations.

Key Words: Fear of missing out (FOMO), higher education, social media, COVID-19.

1. Introduction

Earlier this year, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) a worldwide public health emergency, emphasizing the threat it poses to global public health. It has had a profound impact on many aspects of life, resulting in greater poverty, unemployment, inequality, movement limitations, and an enormous healthcare load. The epidemic has had less evident but significant emotional and mental health impacts in addition to societal and economic disruption (Ashiru, Oluwajana & Biabor, 2022). Various organizations have joined forces to detect and address the negative consequences of the epidemic on individual and social well-being, including public health authorities, government institutions, and academics (Hayran & Anik, 2021).

Throughout the world adolescence are developing a fear of missing out. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to the phenomenon known as "fear of missing out." A student may have challenges if his or her need for connectivity is not addressed (Pryzbylski, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013). At a meeting in Geneva on January 30th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified COVID-19 as a global public health problem of global concern (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). For the sake of halting the spread of COVID-19, all academic

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institutions both domestically and internationally were shut down on March 1, 2020, according to Toquero (2020). Distance learning was seen as the only plausible choice for resuming the education that had been halted for a few months because of the Covid-19 threat, and educational experts were forced to reexamine the conventional technique of face-to-face instruction. All of these factors contributed to a rise, in the amount of time that students spend on social media (Aboagye et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

Adolescents are always on the prowl for fresh information about the world around them, as well as about themselves (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Consumers use mass media to construct their own identities, as evidenced by several research papers on this topic (Lloyd, 2002; Moreno, Kota, Schoohs, & Whitehill, 2013). In order to meet their communication needs, an increasing number of young people are turning to the Internet and specifically social networking sites (Boyd, 2007; Madden et al., 2013). The interest is increasing in the phenomena of "fear of missing out" (FoMO) among people who are continuously exposed to and linked to the lives of others because of the popularity of social media is rising (Morford, 2010; Wortham, 2011).

Adolescence has long been marked by the "fear that one may lose out on rewarding experiences that other people are experiencing," but the ubiquitous and constant nature of social media will only serve to accentuate this feeling, making it even more relevant to today's teen (Harrigan, Benz, Hauck, LaRocca, Renders & Roney, (2021). A growing body of evidence suggests that social media's rising prominence has negative psychological consequences for some users, rising feelings of loneliness or a "fear of losing out on something finer than what they are now experiencing" are examples of such symptoms," despite the unique benefits these networks provide their users (such as long-distance communication and meeting like-minded individuals) (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Pryzbylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013; Turkle, 2011). As a result of one's self-perception, mental health, and personality traits, one may have a proactive or reactive socio-cognitive schema when it comes to social media use (Lloyd, 2002). People who are prone to uncertainty and poor self-esteem are less likely to benefit from social media engagement than those who are curious and resilient to face the hardships.

Overcoming Adolescence and Appealing to Make-Believe Audiences

Identity formation and the pursuit of social interaction. In his view of human development, Erikson (1968) notably describes the fundamental task of adolescence as identity versus role ambiguity. Teenage years are when people are forming their identities the most, even though this process goes on for the rest of their life. Instead of asking "Who am I?" Erikson saw the question of identity to be one of "What do I wish to construct of myself and what do I have to work with?" (Click here to see page 314). To establish an identity, one may combine the past experiences with new ones, explore various locations and roles in the world (e.g., religious/political affiliation, career path), and eventually make firm and acceptable commitments. This is a major endeavor of identity creation.

According to developmental psychologists for many years, adolescents go through an intense period of "soul-searching" and "social connection-negotiation." Sullivan (1953) used one's understanding of interpersonal relationships to categories developmental stages. Using a "self-system" capable of healthy involvement to deal with social anxiety while engaging with others signifies, in his paradigm, the successful completion of identity formation. As Erikson (1968) put it, teenagers have to figure out who they are by active observation of their

environment, social interaction with peers, and self-reflection on newly discovered interests. Relationships with others are critical to balancing one's own values with those of others, according to Erikson. Stone (1981) considered the process of forming an identity to be public; including the "identification announcement," or how a teen proclaims their identity, and the "identity placement," or what those who are observing the teen believe suits such a proclamation (p. 188). When a person's circumstance matches their announcement, their identity is developed.

As described by the International Classification of Psychological Disorders, fear of missing out (FOMO) is "a continuous anxiety that others may be experiencing enjoyable experiences from which one is absent." In a wider sense, it refers to the negative feeling that results from being aware of previously neglected events. As shown by increased media attention and academic research, FOMO has grown more pervasive in society. 81 percent of those who took part in a recent survey performed before the outbreak with 936 persons from varied socio-demographic backgrounds reported having experienced FOMO at least once (Gioia, Fioravanti, Casale & Boursier, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

As a consequence of their anxiety over being left out of the loop during the COVID-19 pandemic, college students have altered their ways of thinking and learning. During adolescence, which is typically seen as a period of role confusion, teens actively explore their environment, interact with peers, and reflect on their newly discovered preferences (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Trust vs. Mistrust is the first stage. Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt vs. is the third stage. Inferiority vs Industry is the fourth stage of this process. Identity vs. Confusion Stage 5, Intimacy vs. Isolation is Stage 6, 7th Stage is Generativity vs. Stagnation and the 8th stage is Integrity vs. Despair. According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, the fifth stage, identity vs. role ambiguity, occurs throughout adolescence, between the ages of 12 and 18, and lasts throughout adolescence. In order to uncover their own values, beliefs, and ambitions, a teenager must go through a period of rigorous self-examination and reflection. This study was work into the next stage.

3. Rationale of the Study

Students' mental health during the COVID-19 epidemic should be investigated since there has been little study into this topic in Pakistan, and there has also been little information regarding students' mental health throughout the pandemic, according to the researchers. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the psychological impacts of dread may have a major influence on the mind strength of students in the classroom (Kumar & Nayar, 2020).

According to research, students with higher levels of education had greater degrees of anxiety, sadness, and stress symptoms than other groups during regular periods (Gomes et al., 2020; Maia & Dias, 2020). The result is that students enrolled in postsecondary education are more likely than other groups to be impacted by the epidemic. As a result, the current research investigated university students' fears of losing out on important events during the COVID-19 epidemic in Punjab, Pakistan.

4. Objectives of the study

The study's objectives are as follows:

To investigate the impact of Fear of Missing Out on pupils during the COVID-19 Pandemic, students at the higher education level were affected.

To find out the significance of social media on students' Fear of Missing Out during COVID-19 Pandemic at higher education level.

5. Research Questions

The following are the research questions for this study:

Q1. When it comes to kids pursuing higher education during the COVID-19 epidemic, what effect does "Fear of Missing Out" have in their lives?

Q2. When it comes to students' Fear of Missing Out during the COVID-19 epidemic at the higher education level, how important is social media?

6. Methodology of the study

As a result, it was carried out in line with the approach of a qualitative questionnaire. The data was subjected to the thematic analysis before being presented. An exploratory qualitative research strategy was used in this study because qualitative techniques are particularly beneficial in uncovering the meaning that individuals attribute to the events that they encounter (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research relies heavily on the researcher as the primary research instrument. Researchers' personal histories and identities should be addressed when assessing their own bias (Maxwell, 2005).

This study relied heavily on qualitative interviews as the primary data gathering method, and this was done for three reasons. When "investigating people's understanding of the meaning in their daily surroundings," qualitative interviewing is a useful strategy to use to get information (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). When it comes to "discovering those things we cannot see...feelings, thoughts, and intentions," there is no better tool than an interview (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Participants were reminded of the study's purpose, research methods, expected benefits, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any moment prior to commencing their interview process. This was the first phase in the interview process for the company. Demonstrating that you are well-versed in the topic area will assist you in establishing rapport with respondents (Creswell, 1994).

To provide a complete transcript, the interviews were taped with the consent of the participants (Merriam, 1998). The researcher used written notes to keep track of important themes for subsequent use in interviews and for data analysis.

In order to acquire material that may be utilized for qualitative analysis, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted (Lofland, 1971). Participants in semi-structured interviews are given more freedom to respond in terms of what is meaningful to them, and they also have greater influence over the introduction and flow of subjects throughout the interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Even while interviews were semi-structured at beginning, they became more organized as the triangulation and member verification phases approached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Around one week before their scheduled interview, participants received a copy of the interview protocol so that they could study it and can prepare their responses to the introductory questions. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewers said, "Please tell us about your experiences during the COVID-19 outbreak and your anxiety of losing out." In order to encourage participants, to go into the problem in more depth, the question was framed in this fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We used probing questions when participants were unable to provide a complete response or needed to clarify their thoughts. In the work of Seidman (1991), In addition, participants were often asked "why" after responding to questions throughout the interview process. By asking participants "why," the

researcher hoped to give them enough time to fully comprehend and express their thoughts on their experiences. A hired transcriptionist worked carefully to meticulously transcribe the audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document, since "perfect transcripts are essential for accurate analysis and interpretation of interview data," according to the researchers (Mishler, 1986, p. 50).

Population of the study

In this research, the population consisted of all students enrolled in higher education.

Sampling and Sample

To conduct the research, a multi-stage random sampling method was used. Students from one university of Punjab, University of Sargodha had been selected as a typical sample for the investigation the many stages of sample collecting are shown in this diagram.

Steps of Sampling

Stage 1. Out of 36 districts of Punjab province, only one district that was district Sargodha, was chosen conveniently because it was easily accessible to the researcher.

Stage 2. Out of 33 public sector universities of Punjab, University of Sargodha was selected conveniently.

Stage 3. To conduct the study, researchers exclusively focused on education and psychology departments of University of Sargodha.

Stage 4. From these two departments, six students were selected conveniently for the representative sample.

7. Research Instrument

In order to gather information, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the subjects. It was agreed that semi-structured interviews would be used to get the information. Self-developed interview questions were used by the researcher to explore the phenomenon under study. Tool consisted six questions regarding fear of missing out during COVID-19 pandemic.

How did you keep in touch with your peers (classmates, friends etc.) to know what was happening with them during COVID-19 pandemic?

Please describe how did you use social media during COVID-19 pandemic?

How did you feel during COVID-19 pandemic that your friends were aware about your activities or not?

Do you feel that you spent too much or not enough time to keep up with what is going on during COVID-19 pandemic? Why or why not?

What was your reaction when you missed an opportunity to meet up with your friends during COVID-19 pandemic?

What type of fears aroused when you missed something by social media during COVID-19 pandemic?

8. Findings

It is likely that the attention and learning of undergraduate university students will be hampered if instructors do not take action during COVID-19. When it comes to the COVID-19 epidemic, qualitative research conducted among university students looked at the influence of "fear of missing out" (FOMO). According to the findings of the study, fear of missing out (FOMO) has a detrimental impact on attention and learning of students during COVID-19. It was anticipated that students' ability to retain material, complete tasks, and do well on tests would be impaired as a result of their dread of missing out on something important. They also believed that it was

leading them to lose interest in their academics and to have less motivation to participate in class activities in general. Students, who used cellphones, as well as their peers and professors, reported feeling a sense of detachment. Implementing real-world restrictions on the usage of cellphones in classroom lectures has the potential to mitigate the harmful impacts of FOMO on both attention and learning outcomes. Students may better anticipate their requirements by using Whatsapp, and they can increase the efficacy and success of collaborative learning by developing a connection that supports student-to-student conversations. All of these factors lead to more reliable and advanced learning. Students get an understanding of one another's personality through participating in a range of conversational styles with one another. During epidemics, students have also utilized WhatsApp to communicate information with one another. In addition to text, picture, video, and voice conversations, students use Whatsapp to share information with their classmates and to collaborate on projects. Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, Snapshot, and Instagram are the five most popular social media platforms, with the great majority of people utilizing on a daily basis. TikTok is a video-sharing service that allows users to share short videos. Initial excitement centered on take-home tools, remote access, and tailored simulation activities that students could do at their own leisure after class. Many individuals are feeling more alone and alone than they have ever felt before during the Corona virus crisis. This year, students have completed reading assignments, created blogs, and played games as part of their classwork. Respondent: "I've enjoyed the freedom of being able to do this lab on my own schedule rather than being pressured to meet a strict deadline." Because he was having difficulty understanding this subject, I was able to go through it at my own speed and make certain that he understood everything."

In the words of one student who has been separated from family and close friends, was that "I'm like most others who miss their 'regular' life prior to all of this." The ability to attend family events, engage in group gym classes, stroll down the street with friends, or go to the movies or restaurants with friends is what I miss the most about being a military spouse. Sargodha is the place I miss the most since it was where my dearest buddy used to reside.

9. Conclusion

It is concluded that fear of missing out (FOMO) has a detrimental impact on attention and learning of students during COVID-19. It was anticipated that students' ability to retain material, complete tasks, and do well in learning would be impaired as a result of their dread of missing out on something important. They also believed that it was leading them to lose interest in their academics and to have less motivation to participate in class activities in general. They feel like they are missing more important things than learning and that affect their academic skills and learning process.

10. Suggestions

If students want to avoid feelings of FOMO, they should refrain from wasting their time on social media and instead engage in activities that will enhance their long-term success and well-being on all levels, including the physical, mental, and psychological aspects of their lives. Further, students should not only use the social media just for "Fear of Missing Out," but they should use it for practical and instructional purposes as well.

Students in higher education need assistance and counseling in order to manage and counteract their excessive usage of social media and fear of missing out (FOMO). Similarly, increased information should be provided to students on FOMO, including its causes as well as the impact it has on their mental, physical, and psychological well-being.

Since FOMO is a consequence of social anxiety, pupils should be taught how to manage their negative emotions. Pupils should be taught how to manage emotionally when confronted with a crisis. Students in higher education, as well as people of all ages, should benefit from resilience-building programmes. One of the most effective ways for students to cope with problems is to have a strong sense of self, as one who is positive and resilient.

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