

EPHEMERAL CONTENT AND FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO): THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH

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Abstract

This research studies how students using viral content on social media are influenced by Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). A quantitative cross-sectional study was used to conduct a survey of 700 students (18 to 27 years old) in Rawalpindi and Islamabad using standardized scales in measuring ephemeral content exposure, perceived social exclusion, FOMO and social comparison. Statistical tests, such as Pearson correlation, regression, and moderation tests, have shown that there is a strong positive correlation between exposing people to ephemeral content and developing FOMO ($r = 0.482$, $p < .001$) and perceived social exclusion ($r = 0.342$, $p < .001$). The perceived social exclusion was a great predictor of FOMO (perceived social exclusion: 0.561 and $p < .001$), which demonstrated its mediating characteristics. Nonetheless, the establishment of social comparison had no significant effect in moderating the relationship between exclusion and FOMO ($p = .369$). Demographic results provided a value indicating that gender and preferred platform affected perceived social exclusion whereas the frequency of usage of social media determined FOMO levels. The results show that regular exposure to the fleeting content is likely to increase FOMO mainly because of feelings of being left out. The article presents the empirical evidence from the Pakistani context to fill the existing gap in the literature on ephemeral content and psychological outcomes. The study highlights the need for educational campaigns to increase awareness of the risks to mental health associated with excessive exposure to ephemeral content.

INTRODUCTION

Social media growing rapidly, individuals can now connect, communicate and see their environment differently than they used to. A major new trend in psychology is the surge of stories on social media that are only up for a few minutes and then vanish (Bayer et al., 2018). People feel more motivated to engage often, but this can make them worry that they are

missing out on what others participate in, a situation that psychologists call the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Przybylski et al., 2013). In addition, short-lived posts give people a chance to talk to others instantly, do not put the same pressure on their online profiles and lead to natural forms of honest sharing (Bayer et al., 2018). FOMO has led to more social

anxiety, increased use of social media and lowered satisfaction with life (Elhai et al., 2020). At the same time, not much research has been done on ephemeral content and how it affects FOMO, focusing on the influence of feeling excluded.

It is also possible that the effects of social media on social life may be mediated by how excluded we feel and moderated by how frequently we compare ourselves to others (Vogel et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2016). Although pitting yourself against others on social media can make some people doubt themselves, it can also inspire and encourage individuals to work on their self-development and set goals (Vogel et al., 2014). Though feeling excluded can occasionally happen due to seeing others' lives online, this feature ensures people can still know what is happening in their friends' lives and keep their friendship alive (Neubaum & Kramer, 2017). Given that ephemeral content is widespread at universities, we should examine its role in FOMO and find actions that can help combat it. Regarding this subject, researching young adults, mainly students, is a suitable choice as they are highly involved in temporary content, day-to-day fear of missing out and have differing social and developmental stages. Being constantly exposed to ephemeral content makes them more likely to experience FOMO and compare themselves with others, trying to receive approval from their friends (Przybylski et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2014). Apart from that, young adulthood is important for building self-identity, with social media affecting both their relationships and feelings (Beyens et al., 2021). The research aims to address a lack of studies by exploring the effects of ephemeral content on FOMO, through the filters of perceived social exclusion and social comparison. The ways young adults and social media are related can help shape new tactics to improve their mental health online.

It was found by Wiggins (2019) that being on social media causes increased social anxiety and disappointments, due to the fact that users regularly view someone else's closely crafted photos and updates. As for Valkenburg et al. (2017), their research also pointed out that comparing ourselves to others on social media can increase both inadequacy and FOMO. There has been some focus on how ephemeral content affects a person's self-esteem and body image (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019), but not

many studies have examined its role in causing FOMO (Alt, 2018). According to studies, social media can influence a person's mental health and FOMO is a major part of that.

Being aware of how ephemeral content affects the mind is vital for everyone using social media today. Because ephemeral content disappears quickly, people may repeatedly use social media and can feel more anxious as a result (Bayer et al., 2018). This study will explain how people's feelings of being excluded by society contribute to increased FOMO (Neubaum & Kramer, 2017). Exploring social comparison tendencies will help pinpoint differences in people's susceptibility to FOMO (Appel et al., 2016). This study's findings can guide people using social media, health workers and website developers to manage the negative mental impacts of enjoying ephemeral posts.

Problem Statement

Nowadays, social media such as Instagram or Snapchat allow users to share stories that only last for a short period before being removed. As messages are temporary, users want to frequently check their phones to ensure they do not miss any (Bayer et al., 2018; Vaterlaus et al., 2016). People find it engaging, however, it might also lead them to feel lost out on what others are experiencing online (Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO may lead to anxiety, an increased use of social media and less happiness (Elhai et al., 2020). So far, little research has focused on how FOMO is influenced by ephemeral content (Franchina et al., 2018). In addition, how feeling lonely and comparing your life to theirs affect this relationship hasn't been fully studied (Vogel et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2016).

If someone can't watch social media content quickly, they may feel like they are not involved in events, increasing FOMO (Buglass et al., 2017). People who frequently assess themselves against others are also more prone to experience FOMO after noticing highlight photos on their feed (Vogel et al., 2014). At the same time, researchers do not have enough knowledge about how these factors interact in the context of ephemeral content.

Objectives

1. To investigate if the amount of ephemeral content people see is linked to their feelings of FOMO.

2. To explore how perceived social neglect contributes to the fear of missing out when individuals engage with ephemeral content.
3. To look at the role of seeing other people's lives online on how easily we become worried about missing out.
4. To examine how social comparison influence the relationship between perceived social exclusion and the experience of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) across different demographic groups.

Hypotheses

- H1:** Exposure to ephemeral content is positively related to FOMO.
- H2:** Exposure to ephemeral content is positively related to perceived social exclusion.
- H3:** Perceived social exclusion is positively related to FOMO.
- H4:** Social comparison moderates the relationship between perceived social exclusion and FOMO.

Literature review

Ephemeral content and FOMO

Ephemeral content which quickly disappears, is now a common part of Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook. There are disappearing content settings on these platforms and users frequently return to check the app until it disappears after 24 hours (Vaterlaus et al., 2019). Because such content is ephemeral, users are affected by it more by the principle of scarcity and worry about not experiencing valuable social interactions which leads to greater FOMO (Alt, 2017; Bayer et al., 2018). Its very nature means it is available for only a short time which can lead to users feeling like they're missing out. If friends add ephemeral content in social media, missing it can sometimes make a user feel left out of what's going on around them. They might use social media more often, hoping to be informed about everyone's lives and enjoy seeing new updates. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), FOMO is a frequent anxiety caused by suspecting that others are enjoying exciting events you are not involved in. Things only last for a little while thanks to the design of ephemeral content which makes people feel like they need to act right away. Because stories and snaps disappear quickly, many users become anxious, making them use social media more often (Bayer et al., 2018).

One of the most prominent causes of social comparison is the fear of missing out, or FOMO. Seeing other people's lives on social media could make us feel like we're missing out, which is known as FOMO. Those who suffer from FOMO may often experience feelings of anxiety or exclusion due to the perception that others are enjoying better experiences (Wang et al., 2023). An online questionnaire was filled out by 556 social media users who were involved. Findings showed that people's propensity to store more items online was influenced by social media comparisons with others, with FOMO serving as a mediator for this impact. These benefits aside, it's very uncommon for addictive patterns—like the idea of fluctuating rewards—to influence the design of transient material. According to Montage et al. (2019), this mechanism takes use of people's cognitive and social weaknesses to cause social anxiety and obsessive monitoring. So, according to the research, these psychological processes are used by temporarily visible information to amplify FOMO. According to a study by Chung et al. (2019), users who have a strong desire for closure tend to seek satisfaction from transient material, which might worsen their FOMO. Hence, FOMO, social anxiety, and unhealthy social media use are common themes in the current research. Holte and Volpe (2020) shown that a person's attachment anxiety moderates their anxiety and depressed sentiments, which in turn affects their association amongst boredom proneness on the sense of FOMO. There is some evidence that studies have linked FOMO to social anxiety & attachment anxiety in particular.

Ephemeral content and perceived social exclusion

There are several ways in which individuals might be intentionally or unintentionally excluded from talks; one example is perceived social exclusion (Tandoc et al., 2015). We risk losing track of key indications or online material due to the transient nature of ephemeral content. People may experience feelings of isolation and miscommunication if they fail to keep up with fresh news or photos (Dhir et al., 2018). The inability to see live material might occur whether or not we are actively involved. There are two types of exclusion: passive, in which someone is just not mentioned by other users, and active, in which someone is intentionally left out of a tale. With the

prevalence of interactions among peers on those sites and the potential for digital exclusion to alter people's sense of belonging, Neubaum & Kramer (2017) address this issue.

Empirical studies suggest that social exclusion is more intense when users passively consume content without interacting. This passive consumption, particularly when observing close friends share exclusive content, heightens the feeling of being an outsider (Verduyn et al., 2015). Adolescents are especially vulnerable, as their developmental need for peer validation is thwarted by visible social interaction, they are not part of (Frison & Eggermont, 2015).

Perceived social exclusion and FOMO

With FOMO, concern arises from missing important things, but in problematic smartphone use, smartphones are considered more significant than speaking with others directly. FOMO leads to feelings of social isolation, and those feelings increase both anxiety and the urge to consume more media. Przybylski and colleagues found that excluded individuals often depend on social media to feel connected and stay noticeable. In much the same way, Buglass and colleagues (2017) argued that feeling excluded can lead some to use social media to offset feelings of exclusion among their peers. According to research, FOMO goes further than simply missing gatherings; it also refers to missing out on social exchanges and jokes special to a group. Small acts of exclusion, when repeated, increase social anxiety and lower how confident people feel about themselves (Baker et al., 2016).

However, understanding how social media use leads to FOMO is difficult because studies have conflicting results. Social media helps people connect, measure themselves against peers and seek approval which can enlarge FOMO as they always see others having fun (Jabeen et al., 2023). Yet, some experts think that social media, if used right, can bring people together and lower their chances of social isolation (Mao & Zhang, 2023). Experiencing feelings of exclusion and FOMO may be affected by having neurotic and introverted traits together with low self-esteem (Blackwell et al., 2017). Consequently, a person's personality plays a role in how FOMO appears when they see short-lived content online. In 2023,

Milyavskaya and colleagues showed that FOMO's influence on mental health could increase over time. The researchers believe that those with higher FOMO when first starting their studies are likely to have increased stress and lower well-being later on. Because of this, it's clear that experiencing FOMO for a long time and struggling to stay up-to-date with our peers can cause mental health issues. While some followers feel connected in the community, others may feel outsiders if they think they are outside of the influencer's circle.

Social comparison and FOMO

Researchers still rely on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to help explain FOMO nowadays. Social media, especially ephemeral content, is replete with curated and filtered glimpses into others' lives. These highlight reels often depict joy, achievement, and connectivity, encouraging users to compare their own lives and potentially fall short. Fox and Vendemia (2016) report that users frequently experience negative emotions when comparing themselves to idealized portrayals of others on platforms like Instagram. Vogel et al. (2014) found that upward social comparison (comparing oneself to those perceived as better off) is strongly linked with lower self-worth and increased FOMO. However, not all comparison is upward or destructive. Appel et al. (2016) suggested that lateral comparisons (with peers of similar status) and downward comparisons (with those perceived as worse off) may offer either neutral or self-enhancing effects. For example, seeing a friend succeed in academics may inspire someone else to work harder rather than feel envious.

In the context of ephemeral content, the rapid and visual nature of updates makes users more susceptible to instant, emotional comparisons without deeper reflection. Because users are exposed so briefly, they are unable to reflect or manage their sense of missing out, so FOMO can increase, he argues. The connection between social comparison and brief content is most troubling for adolescents and young adults as they find themselves. When students are afraid of missing out, they tend to avoid work, use the internet more and risk becoming internet-addicted. Basically, FOMO leads students to put off their work and spend more time online, increasing their chance of internet addiction and lowering their attention to

schoolwork. Meanwhile, there are studies that do not agree as clearly as others and some are not as straightforward as you would imagine. A recent research study by Kong et al. (2024) describes this point by showing that FOMO plays both helpful and harmful roles in the process of learning engagement. Chou and Edge (2012) observed that younger users often perceive others as happier or more successful based on the brief glimpses provided by social media stories, reinforcing FOMO and potentially leading to mental health issues. While some comparisons can be motivational, the transient and curated nature of ephemeral content tips the scale toward detrimental comparisons and intensifies FOMO. The current study further investigates how personality traits and usage habits influence this dynamic.

Theoretical framework

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT)

UGT (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) suggests that people turn to media to fulfill their personal and social needs. Ephemeral content on social media fills users' desire for interacting with others, having fun and being up-to-date. Since ephemeral content does not last long, it encourages people to watch their feed often to make sure they do not miss anything important (Beyens et al., 2016). Researcher suggested, engaging with things like stories that disappear shortly after can lead users to feel anxious about not taking part in important social events (Elhai et al., 2021). As a result, people who rely on ephemeral content to feel socially connected may experience more distress when they believe they've missed something important. According to the research, the constant checking and fear of missing out are tied to users' desire to stay socially relevant, but looking at findings, while UGT supports the idea that users are motivated by connection and information, it may not fully explain the emotional outcomes like exclusion and FOMO. However, the theory underpins the motivations that drive users to engage with ephemeral content in the first place.

Self-determination theory (SDT)

In SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), autonomy, competence and relatedness are identified as the basic psychological needs of people. Individuals experience relatedness when they feel included in social activities; feeling excluded from these activities often makes relatedness a concern. Because ephemeral posts are so visible to others, they tend to emphasize differences and cause more people to feel distant from the group (Dhir et al., 2018). On social media, not being noticed in talks or left out of social events makes people feel isolated from their social groups (Williams et al., 2000). The main finding illustrates that relatedness is driven by a desire to belong and be part of events and exclusion from these events becomes an issue with ephemeral sharing. If people come across temporary posts of events they weren't involved in, they start to feel left out, making FOMO more significant. Accordingly, SDT shows that how excluded you feel can play a mediating role in your model.

Social comparison theory (SCT)

According to SCT Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), people use comparisons with others to measure their self-worth. Upward social comparisons are more likely to occur on social media, mainly through the brief 'ephemeral content,' because it offers just a selected glimpse into other people's lives (Vogel et al., 2015). Participation in social comparisons can lead to feeling more excluded and having stronger FOMO (Appel et al., 2015). Consequently, people who engage in a lot of social comparisons are likely to become distressed much more easily when they feel left out by others. According to the research, those who often evaluate themselves next to others are more at risk of FOMO, but looking at your findings, when you used SCT, it did not play a major role in exclusion-FOMO. However, the theory underpins the concept behind your model.

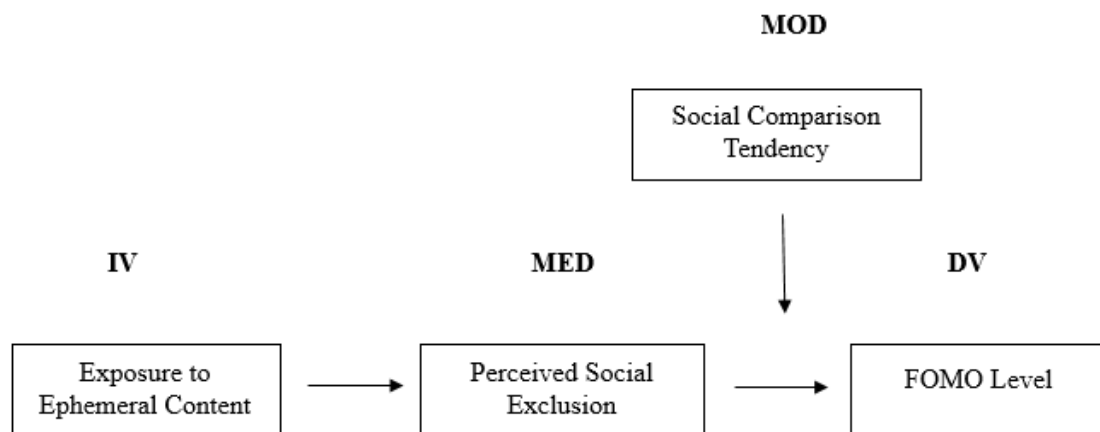


Figure 1: Research Model

Methodology

The study is important for academia because it uses a strong design, thorough sampling and empirical evidence. A quantitative cross-sectional design is used in this research, making the findings reliable and valid as the collected data can be statistically analyzed. Applying the Ephemeral Content Scale, Perceived Social Exclusion Scale, FOMO Scale and Social Comparison Scale makes the measures of the study variables more accurate and consistent with theory. In addition, selecting 700 students from Rawalpindi and Islamabad for the sample provides good statistical data and supports the findings' application to the whole group. Clearly outlining the criteria that included or excluded people contributed to making sure that the right people with similar characteristics took part in the study. The researchers made sure the study was ethical by respecting informed consent, privacy and anonymity. With this approach, researchers can study how temporary content, social rejection, how others look and fear of missing out are related among Pakistani youth. This way of studying can be demanding and still very important, so it shares important points with scholars, researchers and professionals in mental health.

Collecting data from a big population using quantitative survey research is valued by academics as it makes it possible to find patterns and relationships, as well as to make general results. While qualitative approaches look closely at an issue, survey methods let researchers check for connections between different factors among different groups by means of questionnaires (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). We

chose a cross-sectional survey to learn how exposure to transient content relates to feelings of missing out, social exclusion and social comparison in university students. The approach works well when learning about new digital actions in places like schools, since it records the real activities of users at scale (Bryman, 2016). Survey research is appreciated because it is fair and can be repeated much like scientific inquiry since the steps are applied consistently and the results can be analyzed mathematically. Controversies about surveys possibly overlooking the details of various phenomena and using self-reported responses have not lessened the amount of value surveys provide to verification of theories, generation of hypotheses and practical application of knowledge. The inclusion of ethics in surveys means that surveys are valuable in generating knowledge across social sciences, psychology and media studies (Groves et al., 2009).

Research design

To observe the suggested relationship between ephemeral content exposure, FOMO, perceived social exclusion and social comparison, the study used a cross-sectional research approach. Many researchers in psychology and social science rely on cross-sectional designs to observe variables among individuals in a certain population (Kesmodel, 2018). Such a design is effective, fits within the budget and is meant to investigate different associations instead of discovering what causes them (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

Population

This study focuses on university students (Numl, Comsats, Riphah, Szabist and Islamic university of Rawalpindi and Islamabad) who fall in the social media age range of 18 and 27 and frequently use Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook Stories for chatting.

Sample

This study involved both male and female participants. Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 27 and the sample was founded at universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The poll surveyed 700 people. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique suitable for exploratory research.

Data collection and analysis

Prior to the commencement of data collection, formal institutional approval was obtained to ensure that the research adhered to institutional regulations and ethical protocols. No Objection Certificate (NOC) was obtained to collect data from participants. Each participant was provided with a consent form clearly explaining the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, no identifying information was disclosed in the dataset or the final manuscript. Participants' responses were anonymized, and any potentially sensitive information was treated with the utmost discretion.

Numerical data was collected as part of the study's quantitative design. Version 26 of IBM SPSS Statistics was used for the analysis of the gathered data. The research variables were examined using a variety of statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics, regression analysis, ANOVA, Cronbach's alpha reliability, Pearson's correlation, and study variables. A descriptive statistical assessment was conducted to summarize the demographic features of the individuals before testing the model assumptions. We used Pearson's correlation coefficient to analyze the associations between fleeting content exposure, social comparison, felt exclusion, and FOMO. We also used regression analysis to look at how exposure to transient material affected FOMO. To investigate if

there were any disparities in the amount of time people spent engaging with transient material by demography, we used a one-way ANOVA.

Results

Both descriptive and inferential data are used to present the study's findings. The participant demographics are laid out in Table 1, where percentage is a percentage of the entire group and frequency denotes the number of persons in each group. The bulk of the participants were male undergraduates in their early twenties. The vast majority of respondents used Instagram at least once a day, and many of those people spent over eight hours a day on the site. The study's scales' psychometric qualities are shown in Table 2. Higher levels of Cronbach's alpha (α) indicate more trustworthy measures, which represent the inner consistency or dependability of each scale. In statistics, the mean (M) is the average score and the high-level deviation (SD) is the dispersion of all the answers around the mean. Medium levels of seeing transient information, felt social isolation, fear of missing out, and social comparison were suggested by the scores. The results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test comparing means across categories are shown in Table 3. A lower p-value provides greater evidence of an actual difference, whereas the F-value displays the ratio of variance between groups in relation to variation within groups. The p-value reveals whether the distinction are statistically significant. According to the results, perceived social isolation and FOMO were strongly affected by gender and online platforms platform, while FOMO was also significantly affected by frequency of access to social media. The direction and intensity of the association between variables may be measured by looking at the Pearson's correlation coefficients, which are shown in Table 4. All the important categories were positively correlated with one another, meaning that changes in one variable (like exposure to transient material) were linked to changes in other variables (like fear of missing out, perceived isolation from society, and social comparison). What these results show is that college students' online actions on online platforms are significantly related to their real-life emotional and mental experiences.

Table 1: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY VARIABLE (N=700)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	18-20	228	32.6
	21-23	346	49.4
	24-27	126	18.0
Gender	Male	403	57.6
	Female	297	42.4
Education Level	Bachelor's	506	72.3
	Master's	143	20.4
	PHD	51	7.3
Social media platform	Instagram	398	56.9
	Facebook	162	23.1
	Snapchat	138	19.7
Use of social media	Daily Weekly	491	70.1
	Weekly	104	14.9
	Monthly	51	7.3
	Rarely	54	7.7
Time spend on social media	Less than 1 hour	86	12.3
	1-2 hours	178	25.4
	2-4 hours	207	29.6
	More than 4 hours	229	32.7

Note: *f*=frequency, *%*=Percentage

Table 1 shows frequency distribution of study variables shows that 228 (32.6%) of the participants were in the age group of 18–20, 346 (49.4%) were in the 21–23 age group, and 126 (18.0%) of the participants belonged to the 24–27 age category. Gender analysis reveals that 403 (57.6%) of the participants were male, while 297 (42.4%) were female. According to the table, 506 (72.3%) of the participants had completed a bachelor's degree, 143 (20.4%) held a master's degree, and 51 (7.3%) were PhD holders. Regarding preferred social media platforms, 398 (56.9%) of participants reported using Instagram, 162 (23.1%) used Facebook, and 138 (19.7%) used Snapchat. In terms of social media usage frequency, 491 (70.1%) of the participants used it daily, 104 (14.9%) used it weekly, 51 (7.3%) used it monthly, and 54 (7.7%) reported using it rarely. The analysis of time spent on social media shows that 86 (12.3%) participants spent less than 1 hour per day, 178 (25.4%) spent 1–2 hours, 207 (29.6%) spent 2–4 hours, while 229 (32.7%) reported spending more than 4 hours daily on social media platforms.

Table 2: PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF THE SCALES OF THE STUDY.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
EC_REL	.736	8.89	2.98
PSE_REL	.802	11.91	4.27
FOMO_REL	.804	29.06	8.08
SC_REL	.706	17.72	4.87

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha Reliability, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation.

Table 2 shows the psychometric properties of all the scales used in the study. The Ephemeral Content Scale (EC_REL), Perceived Social Exclusion Scale (PSE_REL), Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO_REL), and Social Comparison Scale (SC_REL) were utilized to assess the key variables associated with social media engagement and its psychological impacts. Cronbach's alpha value for EC_REL was 0.736, indicating acceptable internal consistency, while PSE_REL showed a higher reliability with an alpha of 0.802. Similarly, FOMO_REL demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.804$), and SC_REL also showed adequate reliability ($\alpha = 0.706$).

Table No 3: ONE-WAY ANOVA

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>PSE</i>		<i>FOMO</i>	
	<i>F-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Age	.077	.577	.550	.577
Gender	4.298	.039	1.570	.211
Education	2.366	.095	3.402	0.34
Social platform	3.600	.013	3.171	0.24
Use of social media	1.253	.290	4.805	.003
Timespend on social media	1.551	.200	.434	.729

Note: PSE: perceived social exclusion, FOMO: Fear of missing out.

Table 3 shows one-way ANOVA was performed to examine the differences in Perceived Social Exclusion (PSE) and FOMO across various demographic variables. Results obtained from the one-way ANOVA (see Table 1) indicated that PSE (1st dependent variable), significant differences were found across gender ($F = 4.298$, $p = .039$) and social media platform used ($F = 3.600$, $p = .013$). No significant differences in PSE were found based on age ($F = 0.077$, $p = .577$), education level ($F = 2.366$, $p = .095$), use of social media ($F = 1.253$, $p = .290$), or time spent on social media ($F = 1.551$, $p = .200$).

Similarly results of the one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in FOMO (2nd dependent variable), significant differences were found based on use of social media frequency ($F = 4.805$, $p = .003$). Differences based on education level were marginally significant ($F = 3.402$, $p = .034$), while differences in FOMO based on social media platform used were not statistically significant ($F = 3.171$, $p = .024$; note: p-value indicates borderline significance, which may need clarification in context). No significant differences in FOMO were found across age ($F = 0.550$, $p = .577$), gender ($F = 1.570$, $p = .211$), or time spent on social media ($F = 0.434$, $p = .729$).

Table 4: PEARSON'S CORRELATIONS FOR STUDY SCALES.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1. SUM_EC	8.9014	2.98690	-			
2. SUM_PSE	11.9143	4.26900	.342**	-		
3. SUM_FOMO	29.0729	8.08302	.482**	.561**	-	
4. SUM_SC	17.7210	4.87150	.395**	.453**	.638**	-

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation.

Table 4, indicates that Ephemeral Content (SUM_EC) has a significant positive correlation with Perceived Social Exclusion (SUM_PSE) ($r = .342, p < .01$), supporting the hypothesis that increased exposure to time-sensitive social media content may heighten feelings of being left out. Similarly, SUM_EC is positively associated with Fear of Missing Out (SUM_FOMO) ($r = .482, p < .01$) and Social Comparison (SUM_SC) ($r = .395, p < .01$), highlighting the role of ephemeral content in amplifying users' tendencies to compare themselves with others and fear missing social experiences. Perceived Social Exclusion (SUM_PSE) shows a significant positive correlation with FOMO ($r = .561, p < .01$), indicating that individuals who feel excluded are more likely to experience anxiety about missing out on rewarding events. SUM_PSE also correlates positively with Social Comparison ($r = .453, p < .01$), suggesting that exclusion may drive users to compare themselves more frequently. FOMO (SUM_FOMO) demonstrates the strongest positive correlation with Social Comparison (SUM_SC) ($r = .638, p < .01$), reinforcing the idea that individuals who frequently compare themselves with others are more prone to experiencing FOMO when exposed to curated and time-limited online content.

Discussion

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis, which examines the predictive relationships between variables. In this context, beta (β) represents the standardized regression coefficient, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables; higher absolute values of beta suggest stronger effects. The p-value determines whether the relationship is statistically significant, with smaller values indicating stronger evidence that the effect is not due to chance. The confidence interval (CI), shown with lower (LL) and upper limits (UL) at the 95% level, indicates the range within which the true value of the beta coefficient is likely to fall. If the confidence interval does not include zero, the result is considered statistically significant. The regression analysis supports the hypothesized relationships between variables, demonstrating that exposure to ephemeral content significantly predicts psychological constructs such as perceived social exclusion, FOMO, and social comparison. These findings highlight the influence of digital content on users' emotional and cognitive experiences.

Table 5: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Hyp	Relationship	β	p-value	LL (95% CI)	UL (95% CI)	Decision
1.	EC $\rightarrow$ FOMO	.482	.000	1.129	1.841	Significant
2.	EC $\rightarrow$ PSE	.342	.000	.389	.589	Significant
3.	PSE $\rightarrow$ FOMO	.561	.000	.946	1.179	Significant
4.	PSE $\rightarrow$ SC $\rightarrow$ FOMO	0.0083	.369	-0.0098	0.0263	Not Significant

Note: Hyp: Hypothesis. EC: Ephemeral content, PSE: perceived social exclusion, FOMO: fear of missing out, SC: social comparison.

Table 5, shows a significant positive relationship between exposure to ephemeral content (EC) and FOMO ($\beta = 0.482, p < .001$). This finding supports the first hypothesis (H1), affirming that greater exposure to time-sensitive social media content intensifies users' anxiety about missing out on social events and experiences. Prior studies (e.g., Przybylski et al., 2013; Alt, 2018) have similarly emphasized that ephemeral content amplifies the urgency to stay socially connected, thereby increasing FOMO. The current study reinforces these findings by confirming that frequent engagement with disappearing content

significantly predicts FOMO levels among university students.

Ephemeral content exposure was also found to significantly predict perceived social exclusion (PSE) ($\beta = 0.342, p < .001$), providing empirical support for hypothesis (H2). This aligns with the work of Neubaum and Kramer (2017), who reported that missing ephemeral content can lead users to feel ignored or excluded from social circles. The current analysis highlights that as users consume more ephemeral content, their perception of social

exclusion also increases, potentially due to observing social events from which they were absent.

Perceived social exclusion, in turn, exhibited a strong and statistically significant effect on FOMO ($\beta = 0.561$, $p < .001$), validating hypothesis three (H3). This is consistent with findings by Buglass et al. (2017) and Tandoc et al. (2015), who identified that feelings of exclusion often drive users to check social media compulsively in an attempt to remain socially connected. The present study further confirms that perceived exclusion serves as a powerful psychological trigger for FOMO.

However, hypothesis four (H4), which proposed that social comparison moderates the relationship between perceived social exclusion and FOMO, was not supported by the data ($\beta = 0.0083$, $p = .369$). Although previous research (e.g., Appel et al., 2016; Vogel et al., 2014) has shown that social comparison can exacerbate FOMO, the non-significant interaction effect in this study suggests that, in the present sample, social comparison tendencies did not significantly alter the impact of perceived social exclusion on FOMO. This indicates that while social comparison may independently relate to FOMO, it does not necessarily change the strength of the exclusion-FOMO link.

Limitation of the study

While this study provides valuable insights into the psychological impact of ephemeral content on FOMO, it has several limitations. Because research was done using convenience sampling, the findings only apply to university students in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Owing to how the sample was chosen, the findings do not represent the whole population, including younger teens or workers. Next, the research approach is to collect all the data for the analysis at a single moment. Therefore, it is impossible to state whether Instagram's regular stories are causing a growing feeling of missing out. Upcoming studies could track FOMO and social comparison using research designs that last for a long time. Next, the data is based on people's own reports which may result in incorrect or biased results. Since people could either hide their social media habits or exaggerate them, future studies could exploit behavioral tools or conduct interviews to better understand these issues. Even so, this study adds to

the field of social media psychology and provides tips for how to cope with the harmful aspects of using apps that post temporary content.

Recommendations

Researchers in the future need to involve people from other age groups, jobs and locations to help the findings be generalized past university students. Researchers suggest using longitudinal studies to understand the connections between exposure to trending material, feeling left out by society and FOMO. It is also possible to test ways to reduce FOMO using content that quickly disappears. To further understand users, you can carry out interviews or focus groups. Researchers could look into the specifics of different social media platforms (e.g., Instagram and Snapchat) as well as consider self-esteem, paying attention in the present or different personality traits that could determine FOMO.

Conclusion

This study explored whether there is a link between viewing transient content and experiencing FOMO. It was shown by Pearson analysis that each of the key variables, ephemeral content, feeling excluded and ignored by others, the comparison with others and fear of missing out had a significant positive connection. Looking at the findings, greater exposure to ephemeral posts increases FOMO which happens through a positive influence of feeling excluded. So, the more people look at ephemeral content, the more likely they are to feel left out which raises their level of FOMO. Still, social comparison was not shown to play a significant role in the link between perceived social exclusion and FOMO. Researchers found evidence of gender differences in feelings of being left out by society, but not in FOMO. The frequency with which people use social media influenced FOMO, whereas social exclusion was more influenced by the kind of platform. There were no noticeable differences according to either age or the amount of time someone spent on social media. All in all, these findings highlight that viewing short-lived content can lead to FOMO, mainly because it makes people feel excluded on social media. Alerting youth, using preventive methods and educational programs are encouraged to deal with these types of psychological concerns from using social media.

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