

Excluded but Never Offline: Exploring the Relationship Between Ostracism and Fear of Missing Out



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Abstract: *This study explored the link of ostracism and fear of missing out (FoMO) among young adults. A cross-sectional study approach was adopted. Convenience sampling was used to identify 300 university students (150 men and 150 women) between the ages of 18 and 25. Data were obtained using the Ostracism Experience Scale, and fear of missing out scale along with a demographic sheet; all scales exhibited satisfactory reliability. The results of the Pearson correlation showed a strong positive association between ostracism and FoMO. The connection was considerably positive among all sub scales of ostracism and fear of missing out scale.*

Keywords: Ostracism, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Young adults

Introduction

We are living in an era where connectivity and social needs have extended beyond traditional ways. Humans have a constant need to feel connected and belonging to each other and it has turned to be their basic psychological need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When their need of belongingness is threatened then humans experience psychological distress that can significantly impact their emotional, cognitive and behavioral well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In our daily life mostly, people experience the feeling of being excluded for at least one time in a day (Nezlek et

al., 1997). Ostracism is experienced across multiple settings that includes work place setting (Howard et al., 2019), at the schools (Arslan, 2021) and with their partners (Arriaga et al., 2014). Previous work on literature demonstrate that ostracism is not a pleasant experience. Even it was reported that it leads to increased vulnerability for depression (Nolan et al., 2003). The effects of ostracism are more prevalent in young age as compared to older age individuals. This is in accordance with socioemotional selective theory (Carstensen et al., 1999).

Fear of missing out is a feeling of a worry that someone else is having a rewarding experience while I am not having that experience and it also leads to having fear of

social exclusion and this phenomenon is often driven by constant internet and social media use (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). In a study, it was discovered that 15% individuals experienced FOMO at least once a week while 35% experienced it between one and three times per month. A total of 36% indicated encountering less than once a month (Milyavskaya et al., 2018).

Most of the literature about FoMO is related to social platforms and internet use. Fear of missing out is basically connection with what others are doing and is related to social determination theory by Przybylski (Przybylski et al., 2013). Fear of missing out is a state of distress that results from social relationships needs that were not met (Yuan et al., 2020). FoMO, stands for Fear of Missing Out in the literature and it had previously been used in marketing process (Zhong, 2023). The idea of FoMO was altered in year 2014 for using it across various contexts formally (Zhong, 2023). This concept was particularly observable with appearance of social networking sites among the masses (Zhong, 2023). Along with the emergence of social media, the phrase "FoMO" has gained popularity among the people (Zhong, 2023). As the time passes, technology is rapidly developing and changing in the contemporary society, the demand for information is continuously increasing (Zhong, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Most of the studies have conceptualize FoMO as an outcome variable of social platforms usage instead of using it as a mediating or explanatory mechanism that links social experiences (for example ostracism) to behavioral outcomes (for example Problematic Internet Use) (Elsayed, 2025). This has limited theoretical development regarding the causal pathways

between social and behavioral constructs (Akbari et al., 2021).

Literature review

Ostracism is explained as the experience of being ignored and also exclusion that is being referred to as the core factor that is a stressor and it is dangerous for core needs that includes belongingness, self-esteem and meaningful existence (Williams, 2009).

The first stage is the detection of ostracism experience in surroundings (Chen, 2024). People experience pain and immediate negative feelings in response to ostracism (Chen, 2024). As the basic needs of a person are effected so the second stage involves doing activities to bring it back to previous optimal level (Chen, 2024). The third stage occurs when people suffer from ostracism experience for long term (Chen, 2024). It involves inability to protect oneself from long term consequence of ostracism (Chen, 2024).

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has been accurately described as general worry that other people probably be having rewarding and pleasant occurrences from which oneself is not present or is unable to experience (Przybylski et al., 2013). It is portrayed by the wish to constantly keep interjoined with what other people are doing (Przybylski et al., 2013). This comprises fright, tension, and anxieties individuals may have concerning being detached with events, happenings, experiences, and discussions occurring across their extended social groups (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Fear of missing out is now freshly re explained as a continuous wish to follow thrilling and delightful lives of other people by means of internet and a condition of continuous tension and worry regarding this (Tanhan et al., 2022, p. 74). Mentioned

definition has highlighted relationship of FoMO to variable of social media, a platform that has considerably contributed to its prevalence in the recent years (Wolniewicz et al., 2018) and its association with problematic smartphone use (Elhai et al., 2016). The idea of FoMO investigate fear of social exclusion. Via social media platforms, there is heightened consciousness of what a person may be missing out in terms of a pleasant time (Weinstein et al., n.d.). In this research, the researcher writes as FoMO creates twisted perceptions of edited lives of other people.

Constant and endless nature of these communication and interactions might lead to feeling alone and insufficient (Weinstein et al., n.d.). It happens by emphasizing others activities and admiration and comparing oneself to others that leads to dangerous and continuous cycle of irresistible checking and interactions. FoMO has a relation with the total amount of time spent on Social Networking Sites as a potent predictor of emotional distress (Weinstein et al., n.d.).

The construct of ostracism can lead to Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) by intruding people's fundamental need for social belonging (Williams, 2009; Przybylski et al., 2013). It also triggering an increasing sensitivity to social disconnection that can make them more worried about being excluded from rewarding experiences (Williams, 2009; Przybylski et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Talking about the variable of ostracism ; it is conceptualized as a social stressor that begins the need of deprivation and emotional discomfort (Williams, 2009). In addition to this, according to the Need Threat Model FoMO appear as the outcomes and result of threatened psychological needs that were caused by ostracism (Williams,

2009). In spite of this, not all people respond to experience of ostracism in the same way and it also highlights the importance of individual differences in this experience.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

Research hypothesis

1. There will be significantly positive relationship between ostracism and fear of missing out

Methodology

Research Design

The research design for this study will be cross sectional design and will determine the impact of ostracism on FoMO. Cross sectional research design is a type of research design that is used to collect data at a single and specific point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The data will be collected through survey research approach method. Convenience sampling technique will be used to collect data for the study from young adults.

The reason to select cross sectional design was that it is relatively in expensive to conduct and data is collected at one point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). They are suitable for generating hypothesis. Cross sectional study design also provides information about the prevalence of the outcomes and exposures that help to guide other study designs (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The data record will be collected from single point in time that will be a quick source of

gaining information in a short span of time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This research design is effective as compared to especially longitudinal research method as it requires less sources and time (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

Sample

The study consists of 300 participants. Data was collected from both gender i.e., men and women, through convenient sampling technique. The sample age range is from 18 to 25 years, young adults age group classified by WHO (2025). Data collection was done from multiple universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Sampling is an important step in research that helps the delivery of findings and ensure quality research (Golzar et al. 2022). Convenience sampling technique is kind of non-probability sampling technique (Golzar et al. 2022). In convenience sampling technique researcher conducts their study on population that is available close (Golzar et al. 2022). Convenience sampling technique is useful in the sense that it is low cost and require less resources (Golzar et al. 2022). Research work is also completed within a short span of time as the researcher has clear idea from where to access the target population (Golzar et al. 2022).

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

Following is the inclusion criteria for the participants of this study

1. Participant must have attended university or is a university student
2. Age of the participant must be between 18 to 25 years

3.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

Following is the exclusion criteria for the participants of this study

1. Participant who has not attended university student
2. Participant who is less than 18 years of age or more than 25 years of age

Instruments

Demographic form

Demographic form included age, gender, qualification, monthly income, marital status, family system, total family members, employment status and no of hours of internet use. Demographics sheets was given along with the rest of the instruments of variables being used in the study. These demographic variables are important in order to know the background factors being impacting the study.

Ostracism Experience Scale (OES)

Ostracism Experience Scale is a self-assessment instrument used to measure whether a person is ostracized or not (Shahzad et al., 2021). The scale consists of 15 items and has two sub scales i.e., 1) ostracism experience and 2) psychological effect. Items for ostracism experience scale range from 1-10 and psychological effect scale range from 11-15, a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). No reverse items are present in the scale. The scale shows good estimation of alpha reliability $\alpha = .97$ (Richman & Leary, 2009).

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

Fear of Missing Out is a psychological phenomenon characterized by a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, leading to a compulsive desire to stay connected with others and an anxiety about being left out (Przybylski et al., 2013b). Fear of missing out scale developed by Przybylski et al., (2013) will be used to determine levels of fear of missing out. High scores on this scale will

indicate greater proneness of fear of missing out.

Procedure

After receiving the approval from university ethics committee, the process of data collection began. Participants were approached individually for data collection. They got evident information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Voluntary participation was made sure. Furthermore, confidentiality, and importance of their participation was explained and a written informed consent was acquired.

Data was collected in a quiet and comfortable sitting area to avoid distractions and ensure their comfort. A demographic form was given following the psychometric tools which were the standardized instruments used to collect data. All the data collected was and will be kept confidential and stored safely.

Analysis

For the purpose of analysis, statistical package for social sciences (SPSS-27) was used. Data that was collected, entered and then cleaned. Further the data was analyzed for possible missing value. Correlational analysis was done using pearson correlation analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The research was performed according to the ethical considerations and guidelines. Before we start the process of data collection, an approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and relevant departmental ethics committee. It includes informed consent of the participants before data collection, confidentiality, right to withdraw, debriefing and data storage. The study made sure the privacy of participants and privacy

of data. Data was collected from different universities of Islamabad. After the data collection process, the data was analyzed according to the required analysis procedures. Then results were reported and the final write up was made.

Results

Table 1.1

S. No.	Variable	OES	OES-exp	OES-psy	FoMO
1	OES	-	.968**	.862**	.609**
2	OES-exp		-	.709**	.543**
3	OES-psy			-	.621**
4	FoMO				-

Table shows the Pearson product moment correlation coefficients among ostracism, fear of missing out, problematic internet use and self-control (n = 300). All statistically significant correlations are noted at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Total Ostracism scale scores showed a near perfect positive correlation with its experience sub scale (OES-exp, $r = 0.968$, $p < 0.01$) and also strong positive correlation with its psychological effects sub scale (OES-psy, $r = 0.862$, $p < 0.01$). Two sub scale of ostracism were also significantly and positively inter correlated ($r = 0.709$, $p < 0.01$) showing that people who reported greater experiences of ostracism also tend to have more severe psychological consequences.

Total OES score was significantly and positively correlated with FoMO ($r = 0.609$, $p < 0.01$). This shows that people who experience greater levels of ostracism are more likely to have greater levels of FoMO. Both sub scales of ostracism also showed significant positive associations with FoMO. OES-exp ($r = 0.543$, $p < 0.01$) and OES-psy ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$). Psychological effects sub scale had shown stronger relationship with FoMO than the experience sub scale.

The results are aligned with hypothesis 1 which suggests the positive relationship between ostracism and fear of missing out.

Discussion

It was also proposed through hypothesis 1 that a beneficial connections exists between ostracism and FoMO besides it, this was also supported. Results are harmonious with already present literature showing that individuals who undergo the phenomenon of social exclusion predispose to develop heightened sensitivity to social information and fear of being excluded from rewarding experiences.

Idea of FoMO since defined by Przybylski et al. (2013), refers to the widespread thoughts that other people potentially be having gratifying happenings without them. People who are ostracized can experience increased anxiety that leads to increased levels of FoMO. This is especially relevant within background of social media, where constant exposure to other person's activities can heighten feelings of exclusion. Previous studies have consistently shown that people who have unmet social needs report higher levels of FoMO. The present research support these results and suggests that ostracism increases psychological vulnerability and thus makes people prone to having social comparison and anxiety about missing out.

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