Fear of Missing Out and Materialism as Predictors of Digital Hoarding in Social Media Influencers

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Abstract: The proposed research aims to explore the fear of missing out and materialism as predictors of digital hoarding among social media influencers. This study looked at how digital hoarding behavior was affected by fear of missing out and materialism. The research design used in this study was survey research design. Purposive sample of study social media influencers of (*N* = 250) with the age range of 18-45 was collected in which (*Male = 101, Female = 149*) were included. The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOs) (Przybylski et al., 2013), materialism scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992), digital hoarding behavior scale (Neave et al., 2019) was used to measure the variables of the study. Correlation analysis showed that fear of missing out has a significant positive correlation with materialism with its sub-scales (success, centrality and happiness) and digital hoarding among influencers. Regression analysis revealed that fear of missing out and materialism has significant positive impact on digital hoarding behavior. Conclusion and implication of current study have been discussed further by focusing on the need for a proactive approach in addressing the challenges posed by fear of missing out, materialism and digital hoarding behavior.

Keywords: fear of missing out, materialism, digital hoarding, social media,

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Introduction

The social media has significantly reshaped the communication, interaction, and content sharing ways of the people (Tandon, 2021). Influencers are one of the most active participants among the social media users, and they use these platforms to accumulate a large following and in most instances to make a career out of it. Although social media may positively impact well-being, overuse has been linked to such adverse consequences as reduced attention, increased stress, and difficulties with emotional control (Summayya et al., 2024). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and materialism are two psychological constructs that have been specifically valuable when analyzing social media behaviors. FoMO is characterized as the fear that others are living more fulfilling and pleasure-filled lives that are sometimes aggravated by use of social media (Przybylski et al., 2013). Materialism on the other hand is the ideology that, happiness and success can be attained by purchasing and exhibiting material things (Richins and Dawson, 1992). FoMO and materialism are of great relevance to the social media influencers because they often present the luxurious lifestyle, promote products, and showcase material wealth.

The digital hoarding is a relatively recent addition to the field that can be described as compulsive acquisition of digital materials, such as files, photographs, and other web-based information, which can also be accompanied by attachment, anxiety, and disorder (Wheaton and Hale, 2018). Theoretically, the current research is based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985) which focuses on three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the ability to make your own choices), competence (the feeling of being effective and successful), and relatedness (the feeling of belonging). FoMO can be viewed through SDT perspective as a source of frustration of relatedness needs in which people strive to receive validation and social belonging by being constantly connected to social media. In the case of influencers, whose livelihood relies on being online all the time, this frustration is usually magnified. With SDT, materialism may indicate the transformation of intrinsic to extrinsic motivation. The need to fill the unmet intrinsic needs may make influencers focus on the representation and advertisement of products, luxury, and consumer-oriented content to generate their online identity and social validation. Likewise, online hoarding practices can prove to be an approach to safeguard self-presentation, store possible resources in the future or guard social connectedness. Therefore, SDT also offers a valuable tool to comprehend the role of the lack of psychological needs in FoMO and materialism, which can lead to digital hoarding, in turn.

Literature Review

Empirical studies have attributed FoMO to obsessive use of social media and anxiety. Przybylski et al. (2013) found FoMO to be a predictor of compulsive checking and excessive social media use, whereas Blackwell et al. (2017) mentioned its use as an ineffective coping strategy of social anxiety. On the same note, Alt (2015) also proved that FoMO has the negative effect of affecting performance in schools through constant digital distraction. Online compulsive behaviors are also related to materialism; Dittmar et al. (2014) identified a positive relationship with excessive purchasing and online consumerism, and Muller et al. (2021) identified a relationship with online data storage and obsession with content. Also, Pieters (2013) noted that high materialism is linked with anxiety and diminished well-being, so materialistic influencers can be more likely to engage in compulsive digital behaviors. Digital hoarding is a relatively new topic that is becoming the subject of scholarly interest. Neave et al. (2020) defined it as the obsessive gathers of online materials that can cause stress and ineffectiveness. Van Bennekom et al. (2015) linked digital hoarding to perfectionism and anxiety, which are caused by the fear of losing potentially valuable information. Other recent researches also demonstrate the links between FoMO, materialism, and digital hoarding: high FoMO people archive too many screenshots or saved content to ensure that they do not feel marginalized, and materialistic ones hoard branded content to promote self-image. Digital hoarding is a new research area in Pakistan. Malik et al. (2021) discovered that students with high FoMO in universities had stronger addiction to social media, especially Tik Tok and Instagram, which confirms the universal relationship between FoMO and compulsive engagement through the Internet. According to Saleem and Zafar (2022), conspicuous consumption on the social media is linked to materialistic orientations among Pakistani youth. This is especially the case with social media influencers in Pakistan, whose business depends on their relevance and the number of followers. Although the relationship between FoMO and materialism and their predictive power in social media addiction and online consumerism have been studied extensively, the joint predictive effect of the two constructs on digital hoarding is little examined. The connection between international studies (Neave et al., 2020; Muller et al., 2021) implies the possibility of connections, but it is not clear which studies have been conducted systematically, particularly in the Pakistani context and among social media influencers. Since the influencers depend on archived posts and online content to sustain their online presence and revenue, it is theoretically and practically important to research the psychological predictors of digital hoarding. The present study addresses this gap by investigating FoMO and materialism as predictors of digital hoarding among social media

influencers, guided by Self-Determination Theory. This research not only advances global understanding of digital hoarding but also provides culturally relevant insights for the rapidly growing community of social media influencers in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

Objectives of the current study are:

i. To examine the relationship among FOMO, materialism and digital hoarding among social media influencers.

ii. To study the role of different demographic variables on fear of missing out, materialism, and digital hoarding among social media influencers.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses of this study are proposed

- There will be significant positive relationship between FOMO, materialism and digital hoarding among social media influencers.
- FOMO and materialism will positively predict digital hoarding among social media influencers.

Research Design

This study follows survey research approach, with purposive sampling technique to collect data from Punjab, Pakistan, comprising both males and females from various residential area, family system, channel status (monetize or non-monetize), no of followers well as different platforms of social media. A sample of (N = 250) with the specific age limits (18-45), with a minimum of 1000 followers on at least one social media platform (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Facebook) and who must actively save and organize digital content was included in the study.

Instruments

The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMO)

Fear of Missing Out Scale created by Przybylski et al. (2013) consists of 10 items and they are presented in the form of the 5-point Likert scale, i.e., the statement can be rated as not at all true (1) to absolutely true (5). The total scores may range between 10 and 50, and the higher the scores, the more it represents FoMO. It has good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha falling between (r = 0.87) and (r = 0.90), suggesting accurate FOMO assessment.

The Material Value Scale (MVS)

The Material Value Scale (MVS), (revised) developed by Richins and Dawson (1992), consist on 6-items version, maintaining the three dimensions. First one is success (item 1 & 2), this dimension assesses the extent to which people define their success and the success of others based on the quantity and quality of belongings. Second dimension is centrality (item 3 & 4), this factor reflects the degree to which acquiring material possessions is central to a person's life. Third dimension is happiness (item 5 & 6), this subscale measures the belief that material possessions and acquisitions are essential to happiness and life satisfaction. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale, typically ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Higher scores indicate stronger materialistic values. The scale proved to have reliable results, with Cronbach showing (α = .72).

Digital Hoarding Behavior Scale

The Digital Hoarding Behavior Scale developed by Neave et al., (2019) is a 10-item self-report measure designed to assess the extent to which individuals engage in behaviors associated with excessive collection and difficulty in deleting digital files such as documents, images, emails, videos, and other data, even when they are no longer needed or used. Each of the 10 items is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Higher total scores indicate a greater tendency toward digital hoarding behavior. This scales shows good internal consistensy i.e., α = 70.

Procedure

This research was conducted after obtaining formal approval from the university's ethical review committee after which, The participants were also informed that their participation in this research is voluntary, consented and that their answers would be anonymous and confidential throughout and after the study so that they can respond freely and honestly in the survey. Anonymity also serves reliability and unbiased responses to collect more reliable data for research. This use of strategy also leads to more free, honest, and valid data for the research. The collected data were then analyzed by descriptive statistics. The correlation of analysis and regression modeling to assess the relationship between study variables was performed.

Findings

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Social Media Influencers (N = 250)

Demographic Variables	***f***	***%***
Gender		
Male	101	40.4
Female	149	59.6
Residence		
Urban	168	67.2
Rural	82	32.8
Family system		
Nuclear	160	64
Joint	90	36
No of Followers		
Less than 5k	171	68.4
More than 5k	79	31.6
Social Media Platform		
Instagram	118	47.2
Facebook	40	16
YouTube	52	20.8
TikTok	40	16
Channel Status		
Monetize	97	38.8
Non-Monetize	153	61.2

Table 2

Pearson Correlation among Study Variables (N = 250)

Variables	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
Fear of Missing Out	.90	-	.46**	.40**	.28**	.39**	.40**
Materialism	.81	-	-	.68**	.68**	.93**	.59**
Success	.86	-	-	-	.34**	.49**	.37**
Centrality	.80	-	-	-	-	.56**	.42**
Happiness	.78	-	-	-	-	-	.55**
Digital Hoarding	.91	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables As shown, FOMO was significantly positively correlated with materialism (r = .46, p < .01), success (r = .40, p < .01), centrality (r = .28, p < .01), happiness (r = .39, p < .01) and digital hoarding behavior (r = .40, p < .01). Materialism demonstrated strong, significant correlations with all its sub-dimensions, success (r = .68, p < .01), centrality (r = .68, p < .01), and happiness (r = .93, p < .01), indicating that the subscales cohesively represent the broader construct of materialism. Furthermore, materialism was significantly positively related to digital hoarding behavior (r = .59, p < .01). Among the subscales, success was positively associated with centrality (r = .34, p < .01), happiness (r = .49, p < .01), digital hoarding behavior (r = .37, p < .01). Centrality was significantly correlated with happiness (r = .56, p < .01), digital hoarding behavior (r = .42, p < .01), whereas happiness showed strong positive relationships with digital hoarding behavior (r = .55, p < .01).

Table 3

Regression Coefficients Analysis Showing the Impact of FOMO on Digital Hoarding among Social Media Influencers (N= 250)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*T*	*P*	95%CI
Constant	16.67***	2.03	8.21	.001	[12.67, 20.66]
Fear of Missing Out	4.81***	.07	6.76	.001	[.34, .62]

Table 3 gives the impact of Fear of Missing out (FoMO) on digital hoarding. This model explained 16% of the variance in digital hoarding (R 2 =.16), the regression was overall significant F(1, 246) = 45.76, p <.001. According to the results, FoMO positively influences digital hoarding (= .39, p =.001).

Table 4

Regression Coefficients Analysis Showing the Impact of Materialism and its Sub-scales on Digital Hoarding among Social Media Influencers (N= 250)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*P*	95%CI
Constant	13.72***	1.49	9.20	.001	[10.79, 16.66]
Materialism	7.25***	.06	11.34	.001	[.59, .85]
Success	.52*	.21	2.46	.014	[.10, .94]
Centrality	.91*	.41	2.22	.027	[.10, 1.72]
Happiness	1.02***	.16	6.14	.000	[.69. 1.35]

Table 4 shows impact of materialism on digital hoarding. The model accounted 34-percent of the variance in digital hoarding (R 2 =.34) and the entire regression was significant (F(1, 246) = 128.80, p <.001). The findings suggest that there is a strong positive impact of materialism on digital hoarding (=.58, p <.001). Also, the sub-dimensions of materialism, namely, success, centrality and happiness showed significant positive influences on digital hoarding.

Table 5

Comparison of Gender on FOMO, Materialism, Success, Centrality, Happiness, and Digital Hoarding (N= 250)

	Male(*n*=101)		Female(*n* =149)			95% CI		
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(246)	LL	UL	Cohen's d
FOMO	26.01	6.33	28.96	6.49	-3.55***	-4.59	-1.31	0.46
M	19.14	5.64	24.66	5.95	-7.33***	-6.99	-4.03	0.95
SU	5.16	2.20	6.37	2.19	-4.42***	-1.74	-.67	0.55
CE	2.85	1.12	3.48	1.22	-4.17***	-.94	-.33	0.53
HA	8.50	2.83	11.16	2.92	-7.12***	-3.39	-1.92	0.92
DH	27.43	7.54	31.72	7.79	-4.32***	-6.24	-2.34	0.55

Note. FOMO = Fear of Missing Out, M = Materialism, SU = Success, CE = Centrality, HA = Happiness, DH = Digital Hoarding

***p* .01. ****p*< .001.

Table 5 shows the mean gender differences and the effect size on the overall measures of fear of missing out, materialism and digital hoarding among social media influencers. The mean difference was significant on fear of missing out t (246) = -3.55, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 28.96, SD = 6.49) on fear of missing out as compared to males (M = 26.01, SD = 6.33). The mean difference was also significant on materialism t (246) = -7.33, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 24.66, SD = 5.95) on materialism as compared to males (M = 19.14, SD = 5.64). Furthermore, the mean difference was also significant on sub-scale of materialism, which is success t (246) = -4.42, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 6.37, SD = 2.19) on success as compared to males (M = 5.16, SD = 2.20). The mean difference was also significant on centrality t (246) = -4.17, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 3.48, SD = 1.22) on centrality as compared to males (M = 2.85, SD = 1.12). The mean difference was also significant on happiness t (246) = -7.12, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 11.16, SD = 2.92) on materialism as compared to males (M = 8.50, SD = 2.83). The mean difference was also significant on digital hoarding behavior t (246) = -4.32, $p < .001$. The findings shows that females scored high (M = 31.72, SD = 7.79) on digital hoarding behavior as compared to males (M = 27.43, SD = 7.54).

Discussion and Recommendations

This study investigated the roles of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and materialism in predicting digital hoarding behavior among social media influencers. The findings provide support for both hypotheses, demonstrating significant positive relationships between FoMO, materialism, and digital hoarding, as well as the predictive value of these constructs.

The first hypothesis proposed a positive relationship between FoMO, materialism, and digital hoarding. Results confirmed that influencers experiencing higher FoMO tend to accumulate large amounts of digital content, including posts, images, videos, and trend-related materials. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that FoMO drives compulsive social media engagement and behaviors aimed at avoiding missed opportunities (Przybylski et al., 2013; Blackwell et al., 2017). Influencers' professional success depends on staying aware of trends and maintaining audience engagement, which amplifies their tendency to hoard digital materials. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective, unfulfilled needs for relatedness and validation may motivate such behaviors, as hoarding digital content provides temporary relief from anxiety and a sense of social connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The second hypothesis examined the predictive role of FoMO and materialism on digital hoarding behavior. Regression analysis confirmed that both constructs significantly predict digital hoarding among influencers. Materialism, characterized by the pursuit of success, centrality of possessions, and association of happiness with material acquisition, was associated with extensive collection and storage of digital content. For influencers, digital assets—including images, marketing materials, and brand collaborations—function as symbolic possessions reflecting career milestones, social status, and online identity (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Mueller, 2019). Together, these findings indicate that both FoMO and materialism contribute to digital hoarding among social media influencers, reflecting a combination of emotional, social, and material motivations. The results also extend theoretical understanding by demonstrating how unmet psychological needs, social comparison pressures, and materialistic orientations interact in digital contexts to drive compulsive behaviors. Practically, this highlights the importance of interventions targeting FoMO and materialism to mitigate digital overload and associated stress in influencers.

Conclusion

This study was done to understand how the fear of missing out (FoMO) and materialism can lead to digital hoarding behavior among social media influencers. The results showed that both FoMO and materialism with all three sub-scales (success, centrality and happiness) have a strong link with digital hoarding behavior. This means that influencers who are afraid of missing out or who place a lot of value on owning things are more likely to collect and store digital content, such as photos, messages, or videos, without deleting them.

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