Not on social media! A Study on the relationship between the Fear of Missing Out, the Need to Belong, and Social Media Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

More than 4.62 billion social media users exist around the world, equating to 58.4 percent of the global population. India has 692 million internet users exhibiting 49 percent of the nation's total population, and has average daily spending of three hours on social media platforms ("India Social Media Statistics 2023 | Most Used Top Platforms," 2023). Social media has transformed the ways people connect and interact with each other and transformed the world into a global village by reducing social distance among people (Ngai et al., 2015). Social media allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content and serve as a means of communication, conveyance, and collaboration among interconnected and interdependent networks of people (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Whiting and Williams (2013) discussed social interaction, information seeking, passing the time, entertainment, relaxation, communication, and convenience as gratifications for social media usage. Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become favorites among teens and adults to spend leisure time. However, there is evidence in the literature that too much presence on social media harms users' well-being (Baker et al., 2016; Tandon et al., 2021). Active social media interactions help users be updated about time trends and other people's lives. This has raised the need to stay constantly connected with one's network (family and friends), due to which social media users prefer to interact with family and friends more than brands on social networking sites. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is not exclusive to social media users. However, people with high FOMO feel compelled to check social media repeatedly to be part of rewarding experiences and know what others are up to.

This distress leads to issues like social comparison, depression, loneliness, anxiety, low self-esteem, and, ultimately, social media addiction (Akbari et al., 2022; Baker et al., 2016; Fuster et al., 2017; Przybylski et al., 2013). Overall, users' well-being gets adversely affected by the fear of missing out and excessive social media usage (Reer et al., 2019). Previous studies have found that a lack of meaningful relatedness and insufficient social connections causes loneliness. People use social media to avoid the social anxiety of loneliness and fulfill the need for meaningful relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Prof & Karaman, 2020; Servidio, 2021).

The relationship between social media usage and the fear of missing out has been investigated in the literature (Dhir et al., 2018; Roberts & David, 2019; Roberts & David, 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). However, few studies address the fear of missing out, loneliness, and the need to belong together in social media users (Dhir et al., 2018; Duman et al., 2019). The present study aims to investigate if FOMO and the need for meaningful relatedness induce the emotion of loneliness in people, which persuades them to engage in social media to avoid such social anxiety. In order to fill this gap present study attempts to use the SOR model and investigate the interplay of FOMO and the need to belong along with psychological distress and loneliness, ultimately causing social media user engagement.

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FEAR OF MISSING OUT

Extensive usage of social media platforms provides real-time access to activities happening around one's network. It has resulted in a type of distress known as the fear of missing out. Due to fear of missing out, a person constitutes a perception that others (friends and family) are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent and tries to stay constantly updated about what others are doing (Przybylski et al., 2013). Studies have found that fear of missing out can contribute to problematic smartphone usage, diminished psychological well-being, sleeping issues, and reduced productivity at work (Baker et al., 2016; Elhai et al., 2016; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2019).
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NEED TO BELONG

Individuals often introduce themselves as a student, mother, friend, introverts, or shy, which signifies that the social relations of human beings are representatives of their identity and personality (Mellor et al., 2008). Baumeister and Leary (1995) claimed that "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships' termed as need to belong" (p. 497). The need to have meaningful relatedness is crucial for emotional and physical well-being. On the other hand, people with a high need to belong often struggle to worry about their interpersonal attachments and are found to be more active on social media platforms (Leary et al., 2013; Roberts & David, 2020). Przybylski et al. (2013) identified that people experiencing lower belongingness are more prompt to experience social anxiety and use social media to stay constantly connected with their connections.

LONELINESS

As per Oxford English Dictionary, 'psychosocial' can be stated as 'pertaining to the influence of social factors on an individual's mind or behavior, and the interrelation of behavioral and social factors.' In previous literature, social media usage and psychosocial well-being were found to be associated (Akbari et al., 2022; Bhagat, 2015). In the present study, loneliness is taken as a measure of psychosocial well-being (Bhagat, 2015; Reer et al., 2019). Heinrich and Gullone (2006) defined loneliness as "an unpleasant experience of isolation that arises when the social relationships are not as per one's desires". Loneliness creates social anxiety, and people depend on social networking sites to cope with such emotions.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

Social media engagement is described as frequent usage of media platforms, even during activities that require concentration (Santos et al., 2021). The literature claims that people with a fear of missing out are more inclined toward social media, which has an impact on their well-being (Agarwal, 2021; Przybylski et al., 2013). The present study aims to investigate the relationship using Instagram as a media platform.

THEORETICAL MODEL

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the SOR model in the field of environmental psychology, where Stimuli (S) reflect environmental aspects that result in psychological or emotional transformation in people (O) and ultimately leads to behavioral response (R). The model states that the behavioral responses of people are shaped by an internal state of emotions and are triggered by external environmental factors.

The SOR model has been used for many studies in the social media context to provide a structured research perspective. Dhir et al. (2018) used fear of missing out and compulsive social media usage as a stimulus, mediated by social media fatigue and the user's well-being as a response, and constructed a model to examine if FOMO mediated by cognitive emotions leads to anxiety and depression. Luqman et al. (2017) applied the SOR model to examine the factors affecting the intention to discontinue Facebook usage.

The SOR model provides a robust theoretical foundation for the present research, where fear of missing out and the need to belong are proposed as stimuli that cause distress to a social media user through loneliness, which in turn affects their social media engagement as a behavioral response. Alt (2015) found that fear of missing out is positively related to social media usage behavior in the classroom. Przybylski et al. (2013) stated that individuals who are not satisfied with the need for belongingness are prone to experience high levels of FOMO

and increased social media engagement. Studies reveal belongingness as a fundamental need for human beings that motivate them to make interpersonal connections, whereas the unsatisfied need to belong or the absence of such healthy connections further results in loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Huahua et al., 2022). Lee et al. (2013) stated that now these days, to gratify their social needs, people are highly reliant on social networking sites.

In research investigating the need for belongingness, loneliness, and life satisfaction, Mellor et al. (2008) found a significant association between the need for belongingness and loneliness of people. Previous studies have been conducted in different contexts, such as political leaders and adolescents. Zumaeta (2019), with the target group of senior-level leaders, found loneliness as a professional hazard demanding a high need for belongingness for the sake of well-being. Also, in the study conducted on adolescents' social media usage, Barry et al. (2017) revealed that social media activities are associated with fear of missing out and loneliness. In recent research studies by C. Barry and Wong (2020) and Net et al. (2022), the fear of missing out was found as a significant predictor of loneliness, stating that people dealing with the fear of missing out are more profound to feel isolated. In the study conducted on 208 undergraduate students, Yang (2016) found social media broadcasting related to loneliness and stated that it could be a way of seeking attention or support from other users. The present study aims to validate the relationship in the context of Instagram.

Loneliness has been defined as an unpleasant experience of isolation due to a lack of healthy social relationships (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). In today's era, to escape such emotions, people are dependent on social networking sites. In the research study conducted on 1865 adolescents, Reer et al. (2019) stated that social media usage is more prevalent among people experiencing loneliness.

Based on the above research studies present study uses the following hypotheses-
H1: FOMO and the need to belong are positively related to Instagram user engagement.
H2: FOMO and the need to belong are positively related to loneliness
H3: Loneliness and Instagram user engagement are positively related.
H4: Loneliness mediates the relationship between fear of missing out and Instagram user engagement
H5: Loneliness mediates the relationship between the need to belong and Instagram user engagement

Figure 1

The study attempts to measure the interplay between FOMO, NTB, loneliness, and Instagram user engagement, which can signify the inter-relationship among selected variables. The study model is exhibited in Figure 1. As per the model, it was assumed that there exists a positive relationship between FOMO, the need to belong with Instagram user engagement, and loneliness, respectively (HI and H2). It was proposed that psychosocial well-being measures of loneliness and Instagram user engagement would be positively related to each other(H3). Afterward, loneliness was also proposed as a mediator between FOMO and Instagram user engagement (H4) and NTB and Instagram user engagement (H5), respectively.

METHODS
Sample and data collection:
A total of 153 responses were collected through a structured questionnaire prepared via Google Forms. Data was collected by way of a convenience sampling method. The data were analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 20, along with the PROCESS macro plug-in. Table 1. Exhibit the demographic profile of the respondents where, out of a total of 153 respondents, 58.8% were female, and 41.2% were male. A major proportion of respondent groups, i.e., 52.3%, belong to the age group of 15-24 years. Results reveal that social media usage is highly prevalent, making up 94.8% of total respondents, whereas Instagram is used by 90.2% of the respondents.

Table : 1 Demographic profile

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	63	41.2
	Female	90	58.8
Age	15-24	80	52.3
	25-34	69	45.1
	35-44	4	2.6
Education	No formal education	2	1.3
	High school graduate	6	3.9
	Bachelor's degree	37	24.2
	Master's degree	84	54.9
	Doctorate	24	15.7
Employment	Government job	9	5.9
	Private	37	24.2
	Business/Self-employed	15	9.8
	Student	92	60.1
Income	Less than 50,000	78	51.0
	50,000-2,50,000	36	23.5
	2,50,000-5,00,000	26	17.0
	Above 5,00,000	13	8.5

Marital status		Married	17	11.1
		Unmarried	135	88.2
		Others	1	.7
Social media usage		Yes	145	94.8
		No	8	5.2
Instagram usage		Yes	138	90.2
		No	15	9.8

Measurement:
The scale of fear of missing out and social media engagement was adapted from (Przybylski et al., 2013), and items were measured on a five-point Likert scale where one stands for "not one day last week" and five "every day last week." The scale for the need to belong was adapted from (Leary et al., 2013), and responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale where one stands for "not at all" and five for "extremely." Loneliness is taken as the measure of psychosocial well-being (Reer et al., 2019), and loneliness measures were adapted from (Hughes et al., 2004). The items for psychosocial well-being were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "Never" and 5 = "Always."

Common method bias test:
To ensure that there exists no common method bias in the latent variables, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The proposed model exhibited a 31% degree of single factor, which is lower than the recommended limit of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

DATA ANALYSIS
The descriptive statistics of the sample were analyzed, as shown in Table 2. Mean, SD and Cronbach's Alpha were calculated using descriptive analysis along with correlation. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis, and PROCESS macro (Model 4) was utilized to run mediation analysis. The table exhibits that social media engagement is positively related to the fear of missing out, psychosocial well-being issues, and the need to belong. Also, the psychosocial well-being measures, i.e., loneliness, are positively related to the need to belong.

Table: 2
Descriptive statistics and correlation between variables.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4
1. IUE	0.839	2.6884	1.04078	1			
2. FOMO	0.812	2.0739	.94801	.331**	1		
3. LON	0.862	2.2633	.92672	.332**	.412**	1	
4. NTB	0.823	2.1902	.97015	.369**	.508**	.500**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
IUE stands for Instagram user engagement, FOMO for fear of missing out, LON for loneliness, DEP for depression, and NTB stands for need to belong.

Testing for mediation:
This proposed model was tested using PROCESS (v.4.1; Model4) macro for SPSS, with a 95% confidence interval. The first hypothesis, H1, proposed that fear of missing out and the need to belong are positively related to Instagram user engagement. Table 3 exhibits that fear of missing out is positively related to Instagram user engagement (b = 0.363, p<0.01); thus, H1 (a) gets supported. Consistent with hypothesis H1(b), results in Table 4 showed that need to belong is positively related to Instagram user engagement (b=0.395, p<.001).

Table: 3

MODEL 1: Results of Multiple regression analysis (N=153)

Predictors	Loneliness			Instagram user engagement					
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Path	b	SE	Path	b	SE	Path	b	SE
Constant		1.42***	0.1741		1.93***	0.2025		1.55***	0.242
FOMO	a	0.4027***	0.0764	c	0.363**	0.0888	c'	0.2565*	0.0953
Loneliness							b	0.2647*	0.0975
F	27.795***			16.69**			12.42***		
R square	0.1697			0.1093			0.1555		

Indirect effect	Effect	Boot S.E.	LLCI	ULCI
FOMO=>Loneliness=>Instagram User Engagement	0.1066	0.0497	0.142	0.2098

Notes. ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05; SE=Standard error; b=unstandardised regression coefficients; LLCI/ULCI=Lower/Upper -level confidence intervals, FOMO= Fear of missing out

Table: 4

MODEL 2: Results of Multiple regression analysis (N=153)

| Predictors | Loneliness | | | Instagram user engagement | | | | | |
| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
	Path	B	SE	Path	b	SE	Path	b	SE
Constant		1.21***	0.1698		1.82***	0.2047		1.553***	0.237
NTB	a	0.4776***	0.0709	c	.3954***	0.0855	c'	0.2898**	0.0974
Loneliness							b	0.221*	0.102
F	45.33***			21.37***			13.32***		
R square	0.25			0.1358			0.1649		

Indirect effect				Effect	Boot S.E.	LLCI	ULCI		
NTB=>Loneliness=>Instagram User Engagement				0.1056	0.0601	-0.0237	0.2169		

Hypothesis 2 postulated that fear of missing out and the need to belong are positively related to loneliness. The results in Tables 3 and 4 indicated that users with a fear of missing out are more likely to feel lonely (b=.40, p<.001), supporting H2 (a). Results also stated that the need to belong is positively related to loneliness (b=.47, p<0.001) supporting H2(b). Hypothesis 3 proposed that Loneliness and Instagram user engagement are positively related to each other. Table 2 indicated that there exists a significant positive correlation between loneliness and Instagram user engagement (r=.332, p<.01). Tables 3 and 4 indicated that after controlling fear of missing out (b=.264, p<.05) and need to belong (b=.221, p<.05) respectively loneliness is positively related to Instagram user engagement. Therefore, H3 gets supported. Hypothesis 4 proposed that loneliness mediates the relationship between fear of missing out and Instagram user engagement. This indirect effect was tested with the bootstrap approach with 5000 resamples in PROCESS macro model number 4 (Mackinnon et al., 2004). Table 3 exhibited that as there is no zero in between the confidence intervals, the indirect effect of fear of missing out on Instagram user engagement through loneliness is significant (indirect effect = .1066., 95%CI= .142,.2098). Thus, H4 was supported by the study results. Hypothesis 5 proposed that the relationship between the need to belong and Instagram user engagement would be mediated by loneliness. Results in Table 4 indicated that the relationship is not significant (indirect effect = .1056, 95%CI= -.0237, 02169). Thus, H5 can't be accepted, stating the relationship between the need to belong and Instagram user engagement doesn't pass through loneliness.

Statistical results are satisfied for the mediation analysis; path a, path b, path c', and path a*b were all significant at 95% CI.

Discussion
Based on the SOR paradigm, the study investigated how fear of missing out and the need to belong induce users' feelings of strain in terms of loneliness and how this further results in Instagram user engagement. Overall, the study proposed to examine the effect of fear of missing out and the need to belong on Instagram user engagement. In addition to this, the mediating role of the psychosocial well-being measure- loneliness was examined. As per empirical results, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were found to be significant and accepted. Whereas H5 was rejected due to insignificant empirical results. The stimulus fear of missing out and the need to belong was

found to be positively related to Instagram user engagement (response). This confirms the finding of previous research studies (Fuster et al., 2017; Roberts & David, 2020; Santos et al., 2021). In their research, Lee et al., (2013) found that affiliation needs to boost interest in social networking sites. Wang et al., (2018) found that the need to belong is positively related to authentic self-presentation on social media. Consistent with the results of the present study, the need for belongingness is positively related to social media engagement.

CONCLUSION

The present study found a positive relationship between the fear of missing out and the need to belong with loneliness. It states that people dealing with a fear of missing out are more likely to feel lonely. This finding was consistent with the results given by Net et al. (2022). Also, In the study conducted on 436 participants, Mellor et al. (2008) found that the need for belongingness is positively related to loneliness. A similar relationship has been found in the present study. The previous study conducted by Reer et al. (2019) found psychosocial well-being measures, i.e., loneliness, as a significant predictor of social media engagement. The present study also revealed that people experiencing loneliness have a higher tendency toward Instagram usage. This study found that loneliness plays a mediating role between fear of missing out and Instagram user engagement.

The partial mediating role of loneliness was determined in the results. It can be stated that people dealing with the fear of missing out are more prone to experience loneliness which ultimately prompts their engagement with Instagram. The role of loneliness was found to be related to social media in previous studies (Reer et al., 2019; Uram & Skalski, 2022). Surprisingly, the mediating role of loneliness does not pass through a need to belong, and Instagram user engagement as empirical results were insignificant. However, there exists a positive relationship between NTB and loneliness, stating people with the need for belongingness tend to feel lonely.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the relationship between the fear of missing out, the need to belong, and social media engagement. Still, the findings of this study have a few limitations in terms of sample size, social media platform, and geographic region. The sample size of the present study is 153; for better generalization of results, a large sample size can be used. Also, the sample group comprises the majority of people aged 15-24 years, along with a large proportion of the sample comprising students. There may be chances of response biases in the study. The study has considered only loneliness as a psychosocial well-being measure. There are other measures also, like self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and social comparison, that could be considered. Here, only one social media platform, i.e., Instagram, has been studied, considering its popularity. Hence generalizability is subjective and limited. But the, future studies can make comparisons among different platforms.

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