Fear of missing out as a predictor of social media use and addiction among Maldivians

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ABSTRACT *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a cognitive factor closely associated with feelings of anxiety that can be relieved through the use of social media. The aim of the study is to determine whether FOMO predicts social media use and addiction among Maldivians. A cross-sectional study design is adopted and a stratified sample of 385 Maldivian adults is selected residing in the capital city, Male'. Data is collected using four instruments: Fear of Missing Out Scale, Bergin Social Media Addiction Scale, Social Media Engagement Scale, and a demographic questionnaire. An independent regression analysis revealed that FOMO significantly accounted for 26% variance in social media use and 32% variance in social media addiction among Maldivian adults. Additionally, a multiple linear regression analysis revealed that social media use was the main mediating factor between FOMO and social media addiction. The findings of the study reveals that Maldivians are vulnerable to a high level of FOMO as well as social media addiction. Implications are then drawn for clinicians to conduct therapy interventions for social media addictions.*

Keywords: fear of missing out, Maldivians, social media addiction

Interpersonal communication is an integral element in fulfilling people's need to connect and have a sense of belongingness (Dienlin et al., 2017). Historically, interpersonal communication mainly took place through face-to-face interactions which involve using both verbal and non-verbal cues (Venter, 2019). However, with recent advances in technology, especially with the expansion of use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, the ways of interpersonal communication have substantially changed to virtual means (Sugimoto et al., 2017). There has been a dramatic increase in the number of social media usage emerging in the year 2005 and by 2015, the number had increased by 75% (Roope, Oliver, & Jan, 2017). Today, it is estimated that more than 2.38 billion people engage on a single social media platform like Facebook per month (Appel et al., 2020). The frequency of social media usage in our day-to-day lives has resulted in a host of emotional, health and relationship problems including social media addiction as well (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). It is evidenced that in the majority of mental disorders, the exact root cause of the disorder is difficult to diagnose (Clark et al., 2017). Similarly, identifying the exact cause of social media addiction still remains not completely clear (Griffths, 2013). Researchers have identified personality traits as a prominent factor that plays a crucial role in social media

addiction (Blackwell et al., 2017). In the present study, FOMO is considered as an inter-personality trait that is one of the main predictors of social media addiction among Maldivians.

Fear of missing out

FOMO refers to unpleasant feelings which arise due to realization that an individual might miss out on gratifying experiences of others. It is also a type of anxiety triggered by the feeling that one might miss out on other people's rewarding experiences (Franchina et al., 2018). Studies indicate that psychological deficits such as the need to connect with others is the root cause of FOMO. This fear can be reduced through accessing social media platforms (Fuster et al., 2017). FOMO is also classified as an intra-personal trait, which motivates people to stay updated on other people's activities, such as accessing their social media platforms (Dogan, 2019). As a consequence, the urge to stay connected with others result an increase in anxiety and irritation levels (Reagle, 2015). This irritation and anxiety arises due to the individual feelings of inadequacy (Abel et al., 2016). The prevalence of FOMO has also considerably increased with the increase of usage of social media platforms (Roberts & David, 2019).

Social media use and social media addiction

Social media use is an engagement in social networking sites or applications to interact, consume or produce content provided by the networking sites (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Social media use has proven to be beneficial in many circumstances, for example, social media has been recognized to be an important outlet to connect with people and to spread knowledge in the current COVID-19 pandemic (Chan et al., 2020). Social media use is productive to an extent, however it has also been criticized that social media involvement only provides "illusionary" benefits (Jenna et al., 2017). In recent years, great emphasis has been placed on the negative impacts of social media, with social media addiction being on top of the list. Social media addiction is defined as the excessive engagement in social media which leads to problematic outcomes (Eijden et al., 2016). American Psychiatric Association has considered social media addiction as one of the main type of internet addiction under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Rooij et al., 2017).Social media addiction brings out the same biochemical symptoms as any other substance abuse, and the withdrawal from social media often leaves an addicted individual restless (Alavi, et al., 2012). Moreover, symptoms of social media addiction can be manifested as emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, mood related as well as resulting in many other psychological issues (Hou et al., 2019). Therefore, the severity of this addiction and overcoming the addiction requires a better understanding of the issue as well as its implications.

Social media use in the Maldives

In the Maldives, nearly 81.4% of the population uses social media applications and the number has been increasing at a rate of 5% over the past 3 years (Yerbury, Shahid, & Riyaz, 2020). While most studies mainly focus on the most frequently

used social app and the time spent on social media in different parts of the world, social media behaviour among Maldivians is rarely discussed. It is evidenced that the majority of Maldivians, in all age groups and gender, actively engage in social media. Infact, social media usage is recorded to be higher in the Maldives compared to other South Asian countries (Jafari et al., 2015). For many Maldivians, social media has become a platform for awareness of the outside world beyond their island as well as beyond the country (Fahmee & Yong., 2016). While some Maldivians engage in social media application to text and connect with people, others use social media to discuss politics, religion, sexuality and to voice their opinion an concerns on various issues (Afiya & Bridgen, 2016). Although social media seems to be used productively by most Maldivians, a host of negative uses of social media has also been evidenced.

One major concern for Maldivians social media creating polarization within the country (Templer, 2019). Moreover, the anonymity of social media is often used to victimize and to target personal hatred towards one another (Yerbury & Shahid, 2017). Not much is known about the demographic details of the Maldivian social media users, but in general, men engage more in social media than women (Fahmee & Yong, 2016).

According to a survey report by the Ministry of Health in Maldives, nearly 40% of the population reported having mental disorders at some point in their life (Ministry of Health, 2017). Additionally, a variety of domestic abuse cases and drug related cases are reported every year (Health Protection Agency, 2014). As majority of the Maldivians use social media platforms and with the increasing prevalence of mental diseases, domestic abuse and drug related cases in the Maldives, it is important that mental health professionals understand the effects of social media on people, especially the vulnerable population in the society. Hence, by drawing connections between the high prevalence of mental health and related issues with the popularity of social media among Maldivians, the goal is to detect the occurrence of social media addiction among Maldivians.

At present, for the Maldives, the comorbidity and prevalence of social media use and addiction among the population remains unclear. Therefore, by assessing the effects of the cognitive factor of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), it will help determine if it is a variable for social media use and addiction.

Theoretical framework

The research incorporates Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the basis for the study. The SDT is an evidence-based theory of motivation which conceptualizes inherent motivations and needs of people in terms of being controlled or autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2012). According to SDT, the mental well-being and self-regulation of people are based on the fulfillment of their basic psychological needs (Pryzbylski et al., 2013). These basic psychological needs are: need for competence, relatedness and autonomy (Desi & Ryan, 2008). The term competence refers to the desire to achieve one's goals. Relatedness refers to the desire to connect with other people and autonomy refers to the desire to be independent and be in a position to self-regulate one's own behaviour (Pryzbyliski et al., 2013).

The present study seeks to find if FOMO is a predictor of social media use and social media addiction. Excessive engagement in social media is driven from

an intrinsic need for human connection, social relatedness and socialization. For instance, social media creates a conducive environment for users to approach situations in the manner of their preference (i.e., autonomy), allowing people to connect and relate to other people they interact with (i.e., relatedness) and the different strategies used by the social media applications provide the users with feeling of mastery, such as posting the best photograph or statuses (i.e., competence). While social media applications have proven to satisfy the need for connectedness, a deprivation in this need can often manifest as FOMO whereby the users can over engage in the media applications and overuse the application in the hopes to satisfy the need (Abel et al., 2016)

Materials and Methods

The study is based on a quantitative cross-sectional design to gather data from participants using four standardized measures to assess the differences in FOMO, Social Media Addiction (SMA) as well as social media use. Demographic data such as age, gender, level of education, the most frequently used social media application and the time spent on social media is measured. Additionally, the study incorporated a predictive correlational design to predict the relationship between these variables.

Participants

The participants of the study are Maldivians living in the capital city, Male', aged 18 years and above and who are active social media users. As the Maldivian population consists of nearly an equal ratio of men and women (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014), the study population included an equal number of men and women to increase the generalizability of the results. The study did not include participants who were aged below 18, as most of the social media platforms have a minimum age requirement of 18 years of age for usage (Chang et al., 2015). Moreover, fluency in English language was an important factor taken into consideration when choosing participants as the instruments were in English. Nearly 98.9% is literate in the Maldives (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Hence, conducting the research and data collection procedures in English is justified.

Power analysis carried out showed that the desirable outcome of 95% confidence and 5% margin of error would be achieved with no less than 384 participants (Faul et al., 2009). Therefore, data was collected from 450 participants to ensure adequate statistical power in the analysis stage as well as to accommodate the possibility of incomplete questionnaires that may have to be rejected.

Sampling technique

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the participants. The study participants were selected from the capital city Male' which has more than 30% of Maldivian population. Male' City has 4 main divisions (Heinveiru, Maafannu, Galolhu and Macchangoalhi) and each division was taken as a single stratum for this study. The participants were approached in various locations within the 4 strata, such as outside shopping malls, coffee shops and cinema areas. From each

stratum, a total of 113 participants were selected randomly. As the locations were public places, institutional consent was not mandatory. Moreover, the strata were further divided based on the gender. From each stratum of 113 participants, 57 participants were female while 57 participants were males selected randomly. The flowchart below represents the sampling technique.
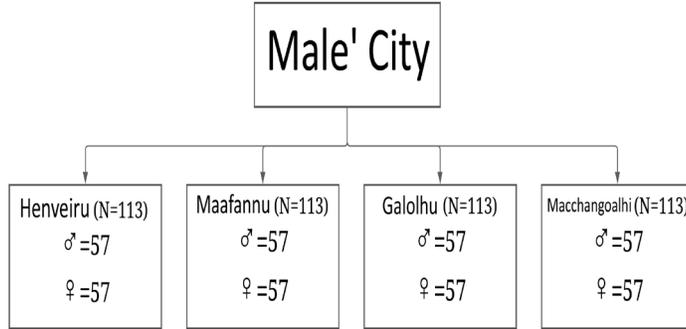

Figure 1. Showing the flow chart for the stratified random sampling technique
(*Note: Each shape represents a stratum*)

Instrument

Three standardized measurements were used in addition to the demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire used in the study assessed the demographic variables of the study such as age, gender, level of education, time spent on social media and the most commonly used social media application. The standardized scales used in the study originated in the United Kingdom, and even though there are cultural differences between the Maldives and the United Kingdom in general, the social media engagement behavior measured by the scales are similar throughout the world (Bolarinwa, 2015). Therefore, the cultural difference within the context of this study is considered insignificant. The scales were used in their original format and was not translated to local language Dhivehi or manipulated in any way and the data was collected in English..

The fear of missing out scale

The Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013) assesses the level of FOMO among participants. It is a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 denotes "Not at all true of me" and 5 donates "Extremely true of me" (Can & Satici, 2019). The scale has a Croncbach alpha score of 0.90 indicating it is highly reliable to use (Gillihan et al., 2018). The scale consists of 10 items and the total score from the scale ranges from 10 to 50 with a categorization from low to severe (low score indicates a low level of FOMO and a higher score indicates higher level of fear of missing out (Riordan et al., 2018). The latent trait analysis of the scale in previous studies show that the scale is extremely sensitive to appraise participants with moderate to a high level of FOMO (Fuster et al., 2017).

The Bergen social media addiction scale

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) is a scale used to assess social media usage among participants and has six main items which reflect the core addiction elements (Monacis et al., 2017). These elements include salience, tolerance, mood modification, conflict, withdrawal and relapse (Sahin, 2018). Additionally, each item within the scale deals with occurrence within a lapse of time of a year. The BSMAS has in cooperated biopsychosocial model as the theoretical framework (Banyai et al., 2016). It is a 6 item self-report measure and uses a likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 denotes "very rarely", 2 denotes "rarely", 3 denotes "sometimes", 4 denotes "often" and 5 denotes "very often". The total score of BSMAS ranges from 6-30, with a categorization of low, moderate (score above 19) and severe (score above 25) and the Cronbach's score of the scale is a=0.87 (Andreassen & Torsheim, 2012).

The social media engagement scale

The Social Media Engagement Scale (SMES) (Przybylski et al., 2013) is a scale used to measure the extent to which people use social media on a daily basis. Moreover, this scale not only assesses the frequency of social media usage, but also provides insight into other activities participants take part in while using the applications (Menayes, 2015). The items of the scale deals with social media usage within the timeframe of a week (Menayes, 2015). This Likert scale consists of 5 items which range from 0 to 7, where 0 stands for "Not one-day last week", and 7 stands for "every day last week". The scale does not have any reverse scoring and the total score of the scale ranges from 0 to 35, with a high score indicating a higher engagement in social networking sites.   The Cronbach's score of the scale shows that it is reliable to use (a=.82 to .89) (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Data collection procedures

The data collection was conducted during the weekends from 8 am to 5pm. The participants who seemed eligible for the study were randomly approached and an introduction about the study along with their right to consent to participate or reject the study was provided to them. Interested participants were instructed on how to fill the scales and after obtaining their consent, the scales were administered to them. The participants were given sufficient time to fill the form and any questions or doubts they had during the study were clarified.

Ethical considerations

Though there were no identified risks associated with the study, precautionary measures were taken to avoid harm to the participants. In addition, the participants were not required to provide personally identifiable information to ensure that their identity remains anonymous. The participants were debriefed about the study to ensure all their doubts and questions were cleared. The collected data was kept securely and was not shared with any other parties to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Despite the precautionary measures, in case the procedure of

filling the questionnaire causes any distress to the participants, the participants were guided to reach for professional support.

The ethical review committee of University of West London approved the study. The risks to the participants were minimized by adhering to the ethical principles and by using accepted and standardized research methods throughout the study. The tools used in the study have been used in previous studies and have not shown any negative impact on the participants (Franchina et al., 2018). The permission and approval from the authors of the tools were not required as they were available online for academic purposes, however, the due credits are given to them.

Results

The numerical data collected from the scales were analysed using the statistical package for social science – SPSS version 24. The descriptive results indicated that there were an equal number of male (n=192) and female (n=192) participants among the total of 384 participants who took part in the study. On an average, 38% of the sample spent a minimum of 5 hours on social networking sites and the most prominently used social networking site was Snapchat. Majority of the participants had a diploma and advanced level diploma certificate. The level of FOMO, social media use and social media addiction and age across the demographic variables are shown in table 2.

Table 1
The Frequency and Percent of the Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	n	Percent
Sex		
Male	192	50.00
Female	192	50.00
Time spent on social media		
1 hour	19	5.00
1-3 hour	76	19.00
3-5 hour	141	36.00
5 hours	142	38.00
Social media platform used		
Facebook	16	4.00
Twitter	66	17.00
Snapchat	127	32.00
Instagram	96	24.00
Reddit		
Level of Education		
Ordinary level	23	6.00

Advanced level	64	16.00
Diploma	99	25.00
Advanced Diploma	106	27.00
Bachelor's Degree	66	17.00
Master's Degree	26	7.00

Note. n= number of participants

As per the table, the average age of the population was 27 years and the scores for FOMO, social media use and social media addiction were 36.08, 20.15 and 26.27, respectively. The mean scores for all the three variables were higher than the cut off scores, indicating vulnerability of the Maldivian population.

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the main hypothesis of the study i.e., FOMO is a predictor of social media use and addiction. A series of diagnostic tests for regression was conducted. The results revealed that the assumption of normality and homoscedasticity was met for all the variables. Hence, simple regression was carried out to predict social media use and social media addiction separately using FOMO as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Regression Coefficients for Social Media Use and Social Media Addiction

Predicted Model	B	Beta	t	F	R2	Adjusted R2
Social Media Use	0.18	0.61*	1.88*	6.02*	0.26	0.22
Social Media Addiction	0.74	0.11*	2.08	4.32*	0.32	0.19

*Note. B= unstandardized Coefficients, t= t value, F=F value, R2= Variance in the data, *=p<0.05*

The regression model is a significant fit for social media use (F (2,223) =6.02, p<0.05) and for social media addiction (F (2,223) =4.32, p<0.05). According to table 2, only 26% variance is indicated in social media use and the 32% variance in social media addiction is explained by FOMO and the generalizability is at 19%. Due to the low variance score, the relationship between the three variables were explored further and the possibility of a connection between the variables were checked. Thus, a multiple regression was conducted using FOMO, social media use, and social media addiction while controlling for other variables and the pathways as shown in figure 2 was established. The addition of social media addiction reduced the original Beta value (Beta= 0.61) but remained significant. Therefore, social media use mediates the relationship between FOMO and social media addiction partially.
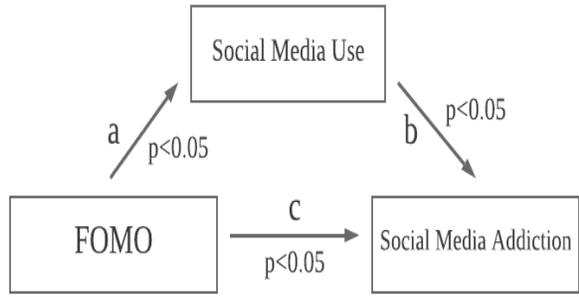
Figure 2. Mediation between the main variables

Discussion

The present study aimed to find if FOMO predicts social media use and addiction among 384 Maldivians residing in the greater Male' region. The findings of the study indicated that there is 26% variance in social media use and 32% variance in social media addiction that was predicted by FOMO. Similar to the findings of this study, Przybylski et al. (2013) discovered that a high level of FOMO is closely associated with excess social media use. Also, Franchina et al. (2018), found that FOMO is a significant predictor of social media use among Flemish Adolescents .Furthermore, Blackwell et al. (2017), studied a group of factors which could influence social media use and addiction, and the findings showed that from all the variables under study, FOMO had the greatest effect on social media addiction (Blackwell et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings of this study are in consistent with the existing research and further provides validity to the research instruments as well as the findings. Previous studies indicate that, individuals who have FOMO tend to be frequent social media users and have higher risks of developing social media addiction (Alt, 2015). Moreover, an unplanned outcome of the study is that social media use mediates the relationship between FOMO and social media addiction. However, this is inconsistent with most studies, which shows a reverse mediation. FOMO mediates the relationship between social media use and social media addiction (Oberst et al., 2016). In social sciences, it is possible to have different findings even though the parameters used for the study are correct (Rosenthal.,1986). The reason for this difference can be explored in future studies.

The present study has a few limitations, such as social media being a new area of study in Maldives there was limited secondary data available to use for comparisons. In addition, the study was conducted only on participants residing in Male' city. As Maldives is an island country in which the islands are separated geographically from one island to another, islanders outside Male' did not get an equal opportunity to participate in the study. Although this may be the case, it may not impact the generalizability of the findings as most islanders from different regions of Maldives migrate to Male' for various reasons. Moreover, the research design used was another limitation of the study, as the use of cross-sectional design limits the study of long-term effects of social media addiction, social media use and FOMO. Therefore, use of a longitudinal design would help to explore new dimensions related to this phenomenon.

The major strength of the present study is that it is the first study conducted in

the Maldives emphasizing on the severity of social media and the need for similar studies to be conducted in future. Also, it is the first study conducted in Maldives to identify the prevalence and association of social media use, social media addiction and level of FOMO as well. Therefore, the study adds to existing literature found on social media addiction elsewhere in the world and as well as the localised data of Maldives. This might help clinicians to design more effective interventions in the long run. In addition, the study carried out face to face data collection, which provided more reliable data in comparison to online data collections (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013).

The findings of the study can be applied to different areas such as in the field of psychology, in social media addiction and interventions and to improve counselling practices as well. The results of the study confirm that social media addiction is highly prevalent in Maldives. This draws critical attention to the importance of designing intervention programmes for social media addiction for clinicians.

Furthermore, as social media is a relatively new concept, and with the technological advancement in the society growing rapidly, clinicians with experience also might struggle to connect with the clients, especially the younger ones. As the findings of the study suggest, the likelihood of the youth struggling with social media addiction is more as compared to the older generations. Therefore, the health care professional could use this kind of knowledge to increase preparedness to understand the clients better and rule out social media addiction. Furthermore, the findings of the study showed that time spent on social media is another covariate making a significant impact on social media addiction. Therefore, in suspected cases of social media addiction, the counsellors and clinicians could use this information for evaluation as well. The present study also makes it abundantly clear that FOMO is highly prevalent in Male' City. With past studies suggesting a mediating effect of FOMO between social media addiction and a host of other mental disorders, it is important that clinicians and other health professionals get familiar with this phenomenon as well.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that the sampled population of Maldives has a high level of fear of missing out, social media use and social media addiction, and that FOMO is a significant predictor of both social media use and social media addiction. As the future of a country depends on the youth, it is essential that the youth are in good condition mentally, physically and spiritually. The findings from the study, and consistent results throughout the world, shows that social media phenomena are highly prevalent among the youth. Therefore, it is importance that more in-depth studies to be conducted in this regard considering other factors related to social media addiction, and device interventions to reduce the high prevalence of social media addiction and fear of missing out among the Maldivian population.

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