HOW TO DEAL WITH FOMO CREATED IN THE DIGITAL WORLD WITH DIGITAL TOOLS

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Abstract - The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to the anxiety incurred by the thoughts that an exciting or interesting thing may currently be happening and you are not a part of it. Not until the advent of social media, FOMO was something under control because accessing an endless source of information at a fingertip was an inconceivable concept. The combination of social media platforms and smartphones bring out FOMO to its full potential. Nowadays social media has become the main source of connection and interaction especially for young people, FOMO thus intensifies and has significant impact to modern life consequently. For better understanding of FOMO effects, this research aims to find ways to live with FOMO by looking at it as a psychological response we cannot evade as we use services of social media platforms and to explore existing digital tools that try to curb smartphone addiction to provide information that benefits smartphone users who want to handle their FOMO better.

Keywords - Digital well-being, FOMO, Social Media, Smartphone

I. INTRODUCTION

FOMO was added to Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 as "anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media." Another widely cited definition from Przybylski et al., who conceived the FOMO scale, is "pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent."[1]

Normally FOMO is associated with negative psychological impact such as anxiety, self-confidence, and sense of belonging. [2, 3] It is not a new concept but with the advent of social media, FOMO's phenomenon is becoming hard to ignore. Various aspects of it have been studied several times over a few decades.

FOMO may sound like a new phenomenon currently appearing due to the advent of social media and smartphone, driving people insane to be in the know at all times, but that is not really the case.

Explained by a clinical psychologist, Anita Sanz [4], FOMO is definitely ancient. Humans' survival in the past relied on being aware of the threat to both individuals and the community. To know meant to have the higher chance of survival. For instance, to miss out knowing the food sources or the potential dangers could be the matter of life and death.

Additionally, we all have a fundamental need to belong and are particularly attuned to social information with implications for social acceptance and rejection. [5] There is a specialised part of the brain sensing that we are being left out. This said part is a part of the limbic system, which controls basic emotions, instinct, and mood. It is called the amygdala which specially detects if something can be a threat to our well-being. The lack of information or the impression of being left out can have amygdalas engaged.

Therefore, understanding the relationship between the causes of FOMO, social media, and smartphone users' behaviour will bring forth the healthier directions to live with FOMO since we can never get rid of it as human beings.

II. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this research is to prove whether FOMO incited on social media can be dealt with by digital tools. There are three main objectives. First, to get to know all the stakeholders from the causes of it to FOMO itself to find how FOMO is formed. This includes the smartphone users, social media sites, and how social media amplifies FOMO.

The second objective aims to find the consequences of FOMO, the positives and negatives.

The next step after identifying the negatives and positives from FOMO is to appease or lessen the negatives by exploring the existing digital well-being tools and to see smartphone users' willingness to try out the available digital tools. Then learn the respondents success and failure in decreasing their screen time, how they felt after the trial, and if there is a difference in the FOMO score.

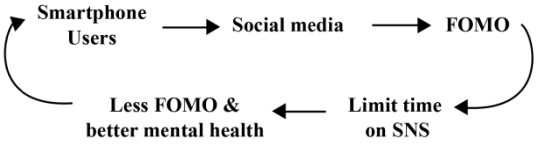


Figure 1. The cycle of the experiment.

III. CAUSES OF FOMO AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In this study, the focus is on the journey of the stimuli that can be seen by smartphone users on social media which arouse FOMO. Those stimuli are categorized into 3 categories: marketing strategy, peer pressure, and novel news. All stimuli fit the explanation from Herman [6] and effectiviology.com [7] well.

1. Awareness of attractive opportunities.
2. A basic sense of importance, control over one's life and capableness which translates into "I should be able to exhaust all the opportunities I want".
3. A perceived norm of opportunity exhaustion by others.

- Dr. Dan Herman (2011)

1. Competence, which represents people's need to feel that they're able to act in an effective manner and exercise their capabilities.
2. Autonomy, which represents people's need to feel that they're in control of their life, in terms of determining their behaviors and goals.
3. Relatedness, which represents people's need to feel that they're connected with others, by caring for others and being cared for by them, and by feeling that they belong in a community.

- effectiviology.com

The investigations follow these research hypotheses;
HYPOS1: Social media users within tight culture spend more time on social media and are more prone to FOMO.

HYPOS2: Social personality types are concerned with the scores on FOMO.

HYPOS3: Those with high FOMO scores would also have high PIU (Problematic Internet Use) scores.

HYPOS4: Users who set time limits on social media sites can lessen the mental negativity from FOMO.

IV. PROCEDURE AND METHOD

Starting with a survey that pinpoints how and how long active social media users use smartphones to spend time on social media, their social personality types, along with their scores on FOMO and PIU (Appendix A) to test **HYPOS1** and **HYPOS2**.

The majority of respondents were Thai and American which can be compared as tight culture and loose culture respectively.

After having the data from the survey, the video-call interviews were conducted on both the respondents who found their use of social media problematic and those who thought they managed the time on it well.

The interviewees who wanted to lessen their time were asked which methods they thought would be the most effective in lessening their social media screen time and to set a time limit on their social media application. Whether they succeed in lessening the screen time and FOMO or not would need to be followed up in two weeks.

V. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

All the participants were active-social-media smartphone users. Their screen time varies from less than an hour to almost 10 hours daily.

20 Thai millennial participants of age between 25-40 took part in this study. 7 were interviewed. All of them felt the need to decrease time they spent on social media. The participants were asked to characterize themselves as an extrovert, introvert, or ambivert. None was an extrovert. 16 females, 2 males, and 2 nonbinary.

5 American millennial participants took part in this study. Only 2 out of 5 felt the need to lessen their screen time. 3 were interviewed.

The participants were asked to choose the factor that would make them want to try a newly opened restaurant the most between; hearing in from a colleague (peer pressure); the restaurant has a promotion (marketing strategy); and just because it's new (novel news).

The majority of the answers was peer pressure (72.72%), followed by novel news (18.1%) and marketing strategy (9%). Which proved the previous studies to be true about social anxiety and being in the known. [8]

From the **Table** above, the FOMO scores of Thai participants have the higher means on every question except 10 which proves **HYPOS1** to be true and their time spent on social media is much higher. 15% spent more than 6 hours a day, on the other hand only 5.6% of American respondents spent longer than 6 hours on social media.

The question about how their circle of friends or family spend time on social media was also included but nothing can be pinpointed by the nonunanimous answers.

Since all of us have to change the way we lived in some ways due to Covid-19, the question on whether or not they changed how they used social media because of the advent of the pandemic was asked. 47% of the interviewees had increased their screen

time especially those who worked from home, 20% had lessened their social media engagement because the news depressed them, and 33% reported they were not affected.
Meanwhile, the social personality types seem to be unrelated to the FOMO score as the result varied which proves **HYPOS2** to be false.
FOMO score is unnecessarily related to PIU score. Some respondents have high FOMO scores but low PIU scores and many have low FOMO scores with medium PIU scores. **HYPOS3** is incorrect.
For **HYPOS4**, the interviewees were asked to set the time limits on the applications or on their phones but the testing period is not over. There is no data available to testify this hypothesis yet.

VI. FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Due to this research being ongoing at the moment, the data collected from participants were incomplete and the result of limiting screen time will be obtained in the middle of April to prove **HYPOS4**. The comparison between other generations and nationalities will be carried out in the near future as the previous survey did not have enough respondents. The personality trait of being introvert, extrovert, and ambivert has nothing to do with FOMO score as the results shown varied. The other types of personality test may be more suitable or personality differences do not matter at all when it comes to FOMO.
After obtaining the result from the time screen limitation, the participants will be asked about their experience of it and then complete the FOMO questionnaire again to compare before and after scores. This will lead us to the answers on how effective the time limit method is on reducing FOMO and improving mental health, and also the obstacles each participant may have to face when trying to impede themself from overindulge in social media. (**HYPOS4**)

VII. CONCLUSION

This study addresses Marketing Strategy, Peer Pressure, and Novel News as the factors found on social media and in real life that provoke FOMO and from the investigation, Peer Pressure has the highest influence. We also found that people with jobs requiring physical activities did not spend as much time online as people who work with screens even when they are off work.
It might be too early to conclude that Easterners are more prone to FOMO than Westerners as the current available samples only consist of two nationalities.

Looking on the bright side, even before interviewing the participants, a handful of them reflected on their behaviour with social media right after finishing up the survey. They set up the time limit or even deleted an account on one of social media sites in order to be more productive offline. Which can be counted as a good sign that by merely coming to know their own screen time, people can reflect on their behaviour and realize how their own mental stages as well as well-being are affected by social media.

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APPENDIX A

Here's the 'Problematic Internet Use' scale. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how much these statements characterize you

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

1. How often do you spend time online when you'd rather sleep?
2. How often do people in your life complain about spending too much time online?
3. How often do you feel tense, irritated, or stressed if you cannot use the Internet for as long as you want to?
4. How often does it happen to you that you feel depressed, moody, or nervous when you are not on the Internet and these feelings stop once you are back online?
5. How often does it happen to you that you wish to decrease the amount of time spent online but you do not succeed?
6. How often do you try to conceal the amount of time spent online?

- Demetrovics et al., January 2013, Journal of Behavioral Addictions 2:19-19The Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ): Validation on different samples

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