Impact of Parental Psychological Control on Adolescent Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): Mediated by Social Media Addiction

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ABSTRACT

This research examined how perceived parental control can affect Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in university students, while also considering the role of social media addiction as a mediator. The study was conducted using 320 university students from which data was collected employing standardized reliable scales for Perceived Parental Control, Social Media Addiction, and FoMO. Correlational and regression analyses showed significant positive relationships for all the three variables. The mediation analysis confirmed that social media addiction partially mediates the relationship between perceived parental control and FoMO, implying that controlling parenting styles can increase the resilience toward FoMO in excessive social media use. The suggested mediation effect again emphasizes parenting dynamics and digital behavior for youth's psychological outcomes and sets the need for awareness programs and preventive interventions targeting the family environment and media consumption habits.

Keywords: Parental Control, Social Media Addiction, Fear of Missing Out, University Students.

INTRODUCTION

Parental Psychological Control

Parental psychological control refers to invasive strategies affecting the adolescents' inner worlds of thought, feeling, and attachment through guilt induction, love withdrawal, or conditional approval (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005). Unlike behavioral control, which sets limits and rules on developmental safety, psychological control undermines adolescents' autonomy and emotional development (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Those adolescents who are targets of such control will often internalize a sense of inadequacy, leading them to seek outside sources of validation. With the ongoing digitization of adolescent life, psychological control may also push adolescents toward hyper-relatedness in social media engagement to recover that autonomy or connection (Niu et al., 2020).

Parental psychological control has recently gained attention as something that fosters negative emotional states, such as anxiety, depression, and social insecurity (Chen et al., 2023). Such adolescents may feel unable to attain real-life social interaction but rather turn toward online spaces for their emotional needs. Online, they feel empowered to fulfill those needs, receiving affirmation that counteracts the sense of restricted agency experienced in their day-to-day lives (Wang et al., 2022). Accordingly, such parental

control may be indirectly responsible for nurturing unhealthy digital habits and psychological dependence on online validation.

Psychological control simply disrupts the adolescent's identity formation, giving them entrance into peer influence (Ahmad et al., 2021). In their need for belonging or approval, they will more intensely focus on peer events, which could arouse the possibility for a fear of missing out (FoMO). Therefore, the inner workings of manipulation through psychological control become fundamental through which adolescents develop their coping mechanisms online and emotionally. In all, understanding parental psychological control as core predictor becomes essential in addressing contemporary adolescent mental health issues. It not only determines their emotional regulation but also, consequently, their media use, making them prone to digital dependence and psychosocial maladjustment (Zhang & Zhou, 2023).

Social Media Addiction

Social media addiction is the nightly compulsion to use social media sites with a consequential ruin of one's mental health, academics, and relationships (Andreassen, 2015). Particularly, adolescents can easily become addicted as developmentally what they need are connections, exploration of one's identity, and peer recognition. Being digital natives, their daily activities surround social media for instant satisfaction and feedback loops.

Research has shown that parenting styles, especially psychologically controlling behaviors, significantly associate with adolescents' patterns of social media usage (Kircaburun et al., 2019). Adolescents having parental psychological control mostly do not have real-life independence and emotional utterance. They just get into social media as an escape route for such an experience. With time, such reliance changes to addiction, compulsive checking, emotional dependence, and neglect regarding responsibilities offline (Marino et al., 2020).

This habit of using social media in an addictive way promotes not merely emotional dysregulation but also being a door through which affects loneliness or the absence of emotional content through comparison, particularly FoMO. Through such measurements, this form of exposure in itself makes adolescents with low self-regulation and dependency on social validation more vulnerable to feeling left out or rejected (Elhai et al., 2020). Therefore, social media addiction mediates the connection between psychologically controlling parenting and the development of FoMO.

The knowledge of the mediatory role of social media addiction has also been essential in constructing intervention strategies tackling the underlying psychological and relational reasons for excessive use of media. It puts a premium on educating parents alongside adolescent media literacy to shatter such emotional dependence and overuse in digital spaces (Tang et al., 2022).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO, or the fear of missing out is described as a general dread that other people are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FoMO always has some connection with the need to be in constant touch (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO has manifested itself in adolescents today as they keep watching everyone else's social media feeds to avoid the feeling of being excluded from activities. This behavioral and emotional reaction is related to unmet social needs and low self-worth.

FoMO, linked with anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and a decrease in life satisfaction, has been recognized more recently as a fundamental psychological problem (Fuster et al., 2022). In many cases, FoMO will affect adolescents who feel controlled or undervalued by their parents because they will hyperconnect to compensate for emotional neglect. The feeling of being included through online presence becomes a poor substitute for impacting real emotional bonds (Dossey, 2021).

FoMO has also been suggested to be a condition in its own right with a psychological basis, with low autonomy, low self-esteem, and insecure attachment contributing to its worsening (Rozgonjuk et al., 2021). Under parental psychological control, adolescents might rely heavily on digital affirmations, keeping a keen eye on the digital activities of others and on social comparison content.

Treatment for FoMO in adolescents needs to be multidimensional. Study of family dynamics and its digital/online behaviors and activities and emotional resilience should be incorporated into the package. Intervening on the level of parental influence and social media activity may be a potential approach for reducing FoMO and its adverse impact on adolescent mental health (Li et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental psychological control is an implicit style of conduct regulation in which parents control children's thoughts, feelings, and attachment by causing them to feel guilty, by withdrawing love, and by displaying conditional approval (Barber, 1996). Parenting is highly related to negative psychological consequences in teens, including worry, low self-esteem, and emotional dysregulation (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010; Moreno-Manso et al., 2020). Research suggests that such control impedes adolescents' autonomy growth and promotes dependence on others for validation, heightening the risk of problem digital behavior (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, psychological control indirectly drives adolescents into over-engagement in digital behavior as compensation.

An increasing body of research names social media addiction as a serious adolescent behavior issue, defined by compulsive behavior, preoccupation, and mood modification through online systems (Andreassen et al., 2017). Adolescents who experience psychological control may locate within social media a venue for self-expression and independence they are denied in the home environment, resulting in excessive use and maladaptive behavior (Niu et al., 2020). In addition, social media addiction has also been associated with poor grades, disrupted sleep, and declining mental health (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2018). These relations highlight the possible mediating effect of social media addiction on controlling parenting and emotional consequences such as FoMO.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) refers to a pervasive anxiety that others are participating in pleasurable experiences in which one is not present (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO has been especially strong among teenagers given the pervasive connectedness enabled by social media platforms. FoMO has been related to reduced satisfaction with life, higher social comparison, and excessive use of social media (Alt, 2015; Oberst et al., 2017). Research indicates that parental psychological control can indirectly promote FoMO by eroding adolescents' self-esteem and propelling them to seek reassurance and affiliation via online media (Yang et al., 2021).

Empirical evidence has supported the mediating role of social media addiction in this process. For instance, a study by Marino et al. (2020) found that adolescents exposed to controlling parenting reported higher levels of Facebook addiction, which in turn predicted higher FoMO. Similarly, Balta et al. (2020) demonstrated that problematic social media use mediated the relationship between negative parenting styles and emotional instability. These results indicate that when teens use social media as a source to fill deficient psychological needs, it can exacerbate their level of exposure to both social comparison and felt exclusion, both core tenets of FoMO.

In summary, the research implies an interplay between digital behavior, adolescent emotional outcomes, and parenting practices that is intricate. Parental psychological control has the potential to instill insecurity and dependence and propel adolescents into overuse of social media, as well as increase their susceptibility to FoMO. These interactions, however, are not universal among individuals; self-esteem will amplify or buffer them. By exploring social media addiction as a mediator, this research provides

insight into how external (parenting) and internal (self-worth) influences come together to shape adolescents' digital and psychological health.

METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives

The several objectives of the study were:

I. To evaluate the effects of parental psychological controls imposed on adolescents and FoMO among these teenagers.

II. Examine the mediating effects of social media addiction on parental psychological control and FoMO.

Research Hypotheses

I. Parental psychological control has a significant positive correlation with adolescent FoMO.

II. Parental psychological control has a significant impact on adolescent FoMO.

III. Social media addiction significantly plays the role of mediator between parental psychological influence and FoMO.

Measurement Instruments

Perceived Parental Control

Parental Psychological Control was measured using the Psychological Control Scale – Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR) developed by Barber (1996). This scale includes 8 items measuring intrusive and manipulative parenting behaviors, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=Not at all like my parent' to 5=Very much like my parent'. The scale has shown good internal consistency, with its Cronbach's alpha being 0.78.

Social Media Addiction

Social Media Addiction was assessed using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) developed by Andreassen et al. (2012). It is composed of 6 items representing addiction core aspects such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. The scoring of responses ranges from 1 (Very rarely) to 5 (Very often) using a 5-point Likert scale. The BSMAS-related reliability has been rated having a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.80 to 0.88 (Andreassen et al., 2012).

Fear of Missing Out

Fear of Missing Out was measured using the FoMO scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1=Not at all true of me' to 5=Extremely true of me'. It assesses the fear of missing out on some potentially rewarding experiences to which others might have access. It has past reported good psychometric properties, having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive Characteristics of the Study Sample (N=320)

Sample Data	f	%

Age			
	18-27	151	47
	28-36	169	53
Gender			
	Women	170	53
	Men	150	46.87
Family system			
	Joint	120	37.25
	Nuclear	200	53.33

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the study sample comprising 320 subjects. Age-wise distribution indicates that 47% of the participants were in the age group of 18 to 27 years while 53% were aged 28 to 36 years. In terms of gender composition, women were 53% and men 46.87%. In terms of the family system, 37.25% of subjects were from joint families while 53.33% were living in nuclear families.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of all the scales (N=320)

Scales	k	α	M	SD	Range		Skew	Kurt
					Actual	Potential		
PPC	8	.76	15.24	7.26	10-32	8-40	.54	.61
FOMO	10	.80	18.98	8.02	16-45	10-50	.43	.48
SMAS	6	.72	9.65	4.03	6-28	6-30	.57	.78

Note: PPC= Perceived Parental Control; FOMO= Fear of Missing Out; SMAS; Social Media Addiction Scale

A summary of the descriptive statistics for the scales used in this study is shown in Table 2. Information on the number of items, reliability coefficients, means, standard deviations, ranges of scores, skewness, and kurtosis for each scale is included in this table, which presents an overall view of the distribution, internal consistency, and variability of the study measures. It, thereby, provides an underlying understanding of the responses of the sample.

Table 3

Correlation matrix between Study Variables (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3

1. PPC	-		
2. FOMO	.42 **	-	
3. SMAS	.75 **	.35 **	-

Note: PPC= Perceived Parental Control; FOMO= Fear of Missing Out; SMAS; Social Media Addiction Scale

Table 3 indicates the correlation coefficient matrix between study variables as analyzed on a sample of 300 participants. Perceived Parental Control (PPC) correlated positively and significantly with both Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), implying that increased perception of parental control was related to increased levels of FOMO and also to a tendency to consume media more. Furthermore, FOMO correlated positively and significantly with SMAS, suggesting that people having a higher FOMO score would also show higher indicators of social media addiction. All correlations were significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable (Fear of Missing Out)

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95%CL
Constant	24.76	6.2	3.99	.00	12.57– 36.95
PPC	10.35	2.9	3.57	.00	4.65 – `16.05
SMAS	12.34	3.1	3.98	.00	6.27- 18.41

Note: PPC= Perceived Parental Control; FOMO= Fear of Missing Out; SMAS; Social Media Addiction Scale

The results of a multiple regression analysis were conducted to assess the effect of perceived parental control (PPC) and social media addiction (SMAS) on fear of missing out (FOMO), which is shown in Table 4. The outcome indicates that both PPC and SMAS were significant positive predictors of FOMO. In a more explicit manner, increasing parental control and social media addiction tend to increase FOMO experiences in the participants. All predictors were statistically significant ($p < .001$), and the confidence intervals lend credence to the durability of the associations.

Table 5

Mediating role Social Media Addiction between Parental Control and Fear of Missing Out (N=320)

					95% CI	
Variables	*R²*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*LL*	*UL*
Total effect	.47	.49***	.09	20.65	.43	.71
PPC--FOMO (c)						
Direct effect						

PPC--SMAS (a)		.38***	.07	24.16	.35	.66
SMAS--FOMO(b)		.54***	.08	13.32	.41	.68
PPC--FOMO (c′)		.39***	.07	8.54	.38	.65
Indirect effect						
PPC—SMAS--FOMO	.61	.35***	.05		.22	.36

Note: PPC= Perceived Parental Control; FOMO= Fear of Missing Out; SMAS; Social Media Addiction Scale

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

Table 5 explicates the mediation analysis looking into the role of social network addiction in the mediation of perceived parental control and fear of missing out in university students. The results demonstrate that perceived parental control significantly predicts fear of missing out, thus having a direct relationship with each other. It was also found that perceived parental control significantly predicts social media addiction, which on its part significantly predicts fear of missing out. The direct effect of perceived parental control on fear of missing out is reduced when controlling for social media addiction, thus showing a partial mediation effect. The indirect pathway of social media addiction is also statistically significant, as it has been confirmed that the confidence interval does not include zero; thus, it supports the conclusion that social media addiction partially mediates the perceptions of parental control to fear of missing out.

DISCUSSION

The study is targeted to determine the influence of perceived parental control (PPC) on fear of missing out (FoMO) among university-going students with a special emphasis on the mediation effect being exercised by social media addiction (SMAS). The authors utilized standardized psychometric instruments such as the Perceived Parental Control Scale ($\alpha = .76$), the Fear of Missing Out Scale ($\alpha = .80$), and the Social Media Addiction Scale ($\alpha = .72$) in their research findings. All scales thus proved their statistical reliability because their measures were in sufficiently satisfactory measures of internal consistency which contributed to the understanding of parenting dynamics in this case.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that perceived parental control should have positive predictions for FoMO, and results confirmed this. A significant positive correlation (r = .42**) and regression analysis indicated that higher parental control dictated higher FoMO levels. This finding replicate what has previously been indicated by studies. Higher psychological control by parents hinders development of autonomy and upsurges dependence externally validated, particularly through social platforms (Elhai et al., 2020; Assunção et al., 2021). Conversely, FoMO has been identified as an outcome that pertains to psychological needs which remain unfulfilled as a result of overprotective parenting styles (Przybylski et al., 2013). This implies that students generally pursue digital involvement so as to compensate for a dearth of autonomy in their real-world environment.

The significant link suggested in Hypothesis 2 between perceived parent control and social media addiction was also retained. The correlation coefficient (r = .75**) and regression analysis confirmed that the level of social media misuse was higher among those experiencing higher parental control, as a probable way to escape or to cope with inadequacies. This finding corroborates the result of Kircaburun et al. (2019), which states that problematic digital habits are even more likely to develop in the adolescents with psychologically controlling parents. Additionally, the enhanced lack of autonomy and increased

surveillance by parents tend to push people toward excessive online engagement (especially on the social networking sites) according to Kuss and Griffiths (2017).

A significant relationship was predicted by Hypothesis 3 between social media addiction and FoMO. Again, this was confirmed. The correlation (r = .35**) and regression results indicated that higher levels of social media addiction were related to heightened FoMO. This is echoing what has been reported in the literature: that social media allows constant opportunities for social comparison and exposure to the curated lifestyles of others, creating greater anxiety about being left out (Oberst et al., 2017; Alt & Boniel-Nissim, 2018). Baker et al. (2016) showed that higher screen time and emotional dependence on social networking significantly increase the level of FoMO experienced by young users.

Hypothesis 4 finally stated that social media addiction would mediate the relationship that existed between parental control and FoMO, which statically was proven through mediation analysis. A significant indirect effect was found, confirming that parental psychological control was influencing FoMO directly but also through increased social media addiction. Theoretically, the mediation is grounded in the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, where thwarting autonomy (as occurs in psychologically controlling environments) leads individuals to seek fulfillment through other means, including online connectivity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Such mediation has also been reported by Brailovskaia et al. (2021) and Balta et al. (2020) who noted that higher levels of parental control leads to an increase in social media dependence that in turn increases Ephemeral FOMO symptoms.

The current study concretizes how the family and its dynamics prescribe the modes of behavior in the digital realm and the accompanying emotional wellbeing. Parental psychological control repainted as a risk for exposure to social media addictions and FoMO among university students. These results highlight the need to promote autonomy-supportive parenting and establish preventive strategies from pseudo-addiction at the digital level among youths in populations.

CONCLUSION

The current research suggests that a perceived parental control has a significant bearing on university students' levels of perceived Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) directly, and indirectly through social media addiction. All the study instruments showed good internal consistencies, thus meaning reliability of the data. Mediation analysis showed that social media addiction significantly accounted for the relationship between psychological controlling parenting and FoMO, in keeping with recent accounts on digital behavior and psychological well-being. These findings indicate the importance of promoting autonomy-supportive parenting practices and necessitate interventions to address excessive use of social media among youth so as to counter FoMO and its risks to mental health. Overall, it speaks to the entanglement of parenting, digital habits, and emotional outcomes in young adults.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The numerous limitations of this study are to be acknowledged. The first is that the cross-sectional design does not allow inference regarding the causality of the variables. Second, self-reported questionnaires were used to gather information, exposing the data to the destructive effects of social desirability or response biases. Third, this research was done only on university students, thus failing to generalize the findings to other population age groups. Longitudinal and experimental studies should be conducted to clarify causal pathways, demography, and qualitative insights on parental control and the psychological effects of social media usage. Such studies would also involve other possible mediators or moderators like peer influence, emotional regulation, and academic stress to form a more extensive model.

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