



**SOCIAL MEDIA INTENSITY, FEAR OF MISSING OUT, AND LIFE
SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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Abstract

Social media use among university students continues to rise, prompting closer scrutiny of how this heavier engagement relates to psychological well-being. This study examined the relationships between social media intensity, fear of missing out (FOMO), and life satisfaction among university students, with particular attention to whether FOMO mediates the link between social media intensity and life satisfaction. A total of N = 307 university students took part in a cross-sectional survey using three instruments: the Social Media Intensity Scale, the Fear of Missing Out Scale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Participants reported moderate levels of both social media intensity and FOMO. Social media intensity was strongly correlated with FOMO ($r = .48, p < .001$) and accounted for roughly 23% of the variance in FOMO scores. Unexpectedly, FOMO was positively, rather than negatively, associated with life satisfaction ($r = .13, p = .022$). A Baron and Kenny mediation analysis found no evidence that FOMO mediated this relationship: its effect on life satisfaction dropped to non-significance once social media intensity was entered into the model. No significant gender differences emerged for either variable. Given the borderline reliability of the Social Media Intensity Scale ($\alpha = .685$), these findings warrant cautious interpretation. Taken together, the results run counter to the common assumption that heavier social media use undermines psychological well-being and point instead to the need for longitudinal research to clarify this relationship over time.

Keywords: Social media intensity, Fear of Missing Out, FOMO, life satisfaction, university students, digital well-being, Pakistan

Introduction

The rapid development and rise of digital technology have greatly changed how people communicate, interact, and share information (Hanandini, 2024). Of these technologies, social media has become one of the most powerful means of communication today. Social media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter allows people to stay socially connected, share experiences with others, and gain access to information in real time (Al-Jbouri et al., 2024). Social media has grown in use on a global scale, especially among young adults and university students, who regard social media as a means of communication, recreation, and social interaction (Aichner et al., 2021). While social media has some benefits, such as improved connectivity, expression, and social support, there have been growing concerns about the psychological impact of social media. Constantly viewing carefully selected online content can foster social comparison, which can impact one's self-esteem, joy, and overall health and

happiness (Zhakin, 2023). Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological state that is strongly linked to social media usage, where users feel they are missing out on enjoyable activities or opportunities they are not part of (Zylinski & Davis, 2022). Previous research has shown relationships between social media use, FOMO, and life satisfaction; however, the underlying psychological mechanisms have been inconsistent. Though the studies on social media and psychological well-being have increased in recent years, the impact of FOMO as a mediator between social media intensity and life satisfaction has not been studied extensively in the context of a Pakistani university student sample in which the intensity of social media use, collectivist cultural values and norms about peer comparison may vary considerably from the western context (Ghai et al., 2022). With the growing involvement of the youth in social media nowadays, there is a need to explore further the effect of digital interaction on their psychological wellbeing in this socio-cultural context. The goal of the present study is to investigate the association between social media intensity, FOMO and life satisfaction among university students and explore the mediating role of FOMO in the relationship between social media intensity and life satisfaction.

There are so many advantages of social media such as self-expression, increased social connections and communication ability. Researchers have, however, been more concerned about the psychological implications of using social media too much. Sustained exposure to edited photos, experiences that one posts online, may make people compare their lives to those of others, which may influence how they perceive happiness, self-worth, and overall well-being (Zhakin, 2023). Such social comparison activities can make people negatively evaluate their own lives when they think might be having more satisfying lives (Şurariu et al., 2025).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is one mental spectacle that received a lot of consideration in connection with the use of social media. FOMO is an ordinary fear that other individuals can enjoy fulfilling lives without their presence (Zylinski & Davis, 2022). Victims of FOMO find themselves being driven to always be active on social networks to keep up with social activities, events, and interaction. These sentiments can be heightened by constant presence of updates, photos, and status posts on social networking sites, and people would be more inclined to monitor their online areas (McBride, 2021).

The idea of FOMO has been thoroughly explored through self-determination theory, which proposes that every one of us has a basic psychological competency, autonomy, and relatedness need (Jacob, 2026). Not being met sufficiently in offline settings, people can resort to social media platforms in search to connect and feel validated. Nevertheless, constant exposure to success and experiences of others on the Internet can also add to expansion of a sense of exclusion and social comparison and consequently support feeling of FOMO (Shahzad et al., 2026).

Social media intensity is closely linked to the feeling of FOMO. Social media intensity is subject to the level to which people incorporate social networking sites into their lives, number of times they access them, and way they feel about sites (Roberts & David, 2022). Having high social media intensity, such individuals spend more time interacting and engaging with online material, communicating with peers, and updating their social media updates. Ensuing exposure can raise the sensitivity of social activities and risk of developing FOMO (Yuan, 2025).

It has been demonstrated in the past that frequent usage of social media can promote social comparison conduct that can affect psychological well-being. Rendering social comparison theory, people rate themselves against successes and lives of others (Yue et al.,



2022). Such comparisons can always be made in social media spaces, since users are often bombarded with meticulously edited images of other lives (Verduyn et al., 2020). Consequently, people can think that others are more exciting or happy in their lives, which can adversely affect their perceptions and feelings (Zhang et al., 2023).

Life satisfaction is another construct that is critical to psychological well-being. Life satisfaction describes a cognitive assessment of the total quality of life of a person as per his or her personal standards and expectations (Pretorius & Padmanabhan Unni, 2022). It is regarded as a major element of subjective well-being and indicates how individuals assess results of their success, their relationships, and their personal satisfaction. Social relationships, emotional experience, and environmental conditions are some factors that affect life satisfaction (Graça & Brandão, 2024). Association amongst social media and life satisfaction has not given consistent results in current literature. Certain literature designates the habit of social media platforms that can help individuals to feel better by supporting communication and sustaining social connections (Akkaş & Turan, 2023). Online communication may also ensure that people maintain contact with their friends and relatives, especially where physical distances pose a barrier to personal interaction. In this scenario, social media impacts a beneficial impact on state of social capital and emotional support (Marttila et al., 2021).

Other studies, however, propose the possibility of negative psychological consequences of too much use, including anxiety, loneliness, and reduced life satisfaction (Marttila et al., 2021). Constant availability of social comparison opportunities can also make a person feel that their lives are less than satisfactory in comparison with idealized images of those found on the Internet (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). Also, people with high FOMO can gain a sense of stress related to necessity to be always connected with digital space, which can cause stress and emotional burnout (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

Recent research indicates that FOMO can serve as a significant psychological process of connecting utilization of social media along with well-being outcomes. Individuals with high rates of FOMO are inclined to be a higher propensity to compulsive checking and enhanced social monitoring in social media. This habit can interfere with everyday life and affect the possibility of having profound offline experiences, thus affecting quality of life in general (Roberts & David, 2019).

Although there is an increased focus on this issue among scholars, connection amid strength of social media use, FOMO, and life satisfaction is still complicated and needs to be researched (Soraci et al., 2025). Most papers that stated and tested connections in social media and psychological well-being on its own, but fewer have tested mediating effect of FOMO in relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. This mediating association is important to understanding psychological mechanisms of digital behavior and its effects on well-being (Abd Ellatif Elsayed, 2025).

More studies are required to study these relationships in the context of developing societies where patterns of using digital technologies and social media are changing at a high pace. Social, educational, and cultural problems can also affect the way people use social media platforms and ways social media interactions affect their psychological experience (Ghai et al., 2022).

The population that is especially topical to study these dynamics is a group of university students, as most of them are users of social media platforms. University years are a period when people usually undergo profound social, academic, and personal changes that can have an impact on their views on well-being and life satisfaction. Social media can be significant in

the development of such experiences because it could influence the process of communication, peers, and social comparison (Masrom et al., 2021).

Thus, current studies investigate associations in social media intensity, fear of missing out (FOMO), and life satisfaction among university students. Authors examine the hypothesis that the higher the social media activity, the higher FOMO will be and, conversely, whether FOMO has a subsequent impact on life satisfaction. Exploring these relationships, the study will aid in understanding the spectrum of digital behavior and psychological well-being and will give a possible psychological implication of social media utilization in terms of young adults.

1.1 Problem Statement

The use of social media has been popular in the contemporary world and has drastically changed how people communicate and interact in modern times. Use of social networking enables individuals in constant contact with their friends, relatives, and rest of the world (Hillyer, 2021; Miller, 2020). Although such websites offer a chance to engage, communicate, and share information, issues have also been raised regarding its psychological effects on end users, especially among young adults and university students who form major group of social media users (Miller, 2020). Fear of Missing out (FOMO) is one of the key psychological phenomena related to the use of social media (Tandon et al., 2021). FOMO denotes persistent feeling of experiencing satisfying activities from which one is absent. Social media environments intensify this experience by constantly presenting users with updates about social gatherings, achievements, and lifestyle experiences of others. Continuous exposure to such content may create feelings of exclusion, social comparison, and anxiety (Raudenská, 2023).

High levels of engagement on social media can create conditions that foster greater experiences of FOMO. When individuals constantly observe diverse media platforms to observe other individuals and what they're up to, they start to notice how active the other individuals are and the urge they receive to be as active as well. The constant checking and comparing can also have adverse effects on psychological wellbeing (Moore & Craciun, 2021). A person's judgment of his or her quality of life and personal fulfilment is an important measure of his or her well-being. While social media usage alone is not related to life dissatisfaction (Alt, 2017), the possible increased sense of FOMO by comparison with friends' lives online may negatively influence the appraisal of one's life satisfaction: to the extent that comparison with others online results in lower life-satisfaction, the overall picture of the social media user could present less satisfying life than perceived by others (Alt, 2017).

The connection between social media use and psychological and wellbeing health have been explored by prior research, but the path of how social media intensity leads to life satisfaction is still not clearly understood (Ostic et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Specifically, there is limited research to test the intermediary effect of FOMO in the association between social media use intensity and life satisfaction among university students (Soraci et al., 2025). However, it is important to establish if there is any positive correlation between more intense social media usage and the increased experience of FOMO and how this higher level of FOMO relates to the individuals' perception of their life satisfaction. This knowledge will provide a pathway to understanding psychological processes as they relate to social media use, and support for interventions that can help young adults have more positive experiences online.

1.2 Research Questions



- Is there an association between social media intensity and fear of missing out (FOMO) among university students?
- How does FOMO co relate to life satisfaction among university students?
- Does FOMO mediate the relationship between social media intensity and life satisfaction among university students?
- Do gender differences exist in social media intensity or in FOMO among university students?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to examine how social media intensity is related to the phenomenon of "fear from missing out (FOMO)" and life satisfaction for a sample of university students. This research aims at fulfilling the following objectives:

- To decide if there is a positive relationship between social media intensity and fear of missing out (FOMO).
- To identify the degree of association between FOMO and life satisfaction.
- To examine whether FOMO mediates the relationship between social media intensity and life satisfaction.
- To analyze gender differences in social media intensity and the extent to which students experience FOMO.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses, developed from the research objectives and theoretical framework, were as follows:

H1: There is a strong, positive co-relation between social media intensity and fear of missing out (FOMO).

H2: There is a significant, negative relationship between FOMO and life satisfaction.

H3: FOMO significantly mediates the relationship between social media intensity and life satisfaction.

H4: There are significant gender differences in social media intensity and FOMO.

1.5 Significance of Study

The current study is a contribution to the growth of literature related to social media and psychological well-being as it examines the effects of "intensity of social media use" on the "fear of missing out" and "life satisfaction." Social media is increasingly becoming a key component of everyday life, and it's critical to begin to understand its psychological implications. First, this research provides some empirical information regarding the mediating concept between the use of social media and life satisfaction. Through analysing the influence of social media intensity on individuals' psychological experiences, research helps to understand digital behaviours and well-being issues, as well as advances theories. Second, results of study can assist teachers, psychologists, and mental health practitioners to have a better insight into psychological issues that come with excessive use of social media.

Recognition of role of FOMO in determining satisfaction with life can help create interventions to encourage more healthy digital habits in young adults. Third, the research fits into a scanty body of literature that analyzes social media behavior among students in a university. Given the fact that young adults are some of most common consumers of social networking sites, it is especially crucial to know how social media can influence their well-being. Lastly, the results of this study can be relevant to policy makers and schools that desire

to come up with awareness campaigns regarding responsible use of media as well as digital well-being.

Literature Review

Rapid advancements in digital communication technologies have significantly influenced social interaction patterns and psychological experiences in modern society (Oluwatoyin, 2021). There are also social media platforms that are now an important thing to have in the day-to-day life, especially for young adults to use as a medium of communication, recreation and socialization (Fiqih et al., 2025). Although these platforms can facilitate connections and communication, they also have been identified as having potential positive and negative psychological impacts such as emotional well-being, social comparison, and life satisfaction (Hagen et al., 2024).

A critical theme in this aspect is social media intensity. Social media intensity could be defined as how much an individual uses social media in their everyday lives, as well as how close they feel to these social media sites. It includes a behavioral component (how frequently one uses social media) as well as a psychological component (e.g. how significant one thinks social media is). The use of social media can provide users with more opportunities for communication and social support; however, it can also cause greater pressure on users due to the constant need for comparison with other users' posts and the need to constantly engage with the digital world (Tegegn, 2024). The use of social media has been found to have consistently been linked to fear of missing out (FOMO). People who utilize social media more are at greater risk of experiencing FOMO feelings, and also engaging in compulsive usage (Jing et al., 2025; Sewall et al., 2022). The more likely people are to experience FOMO, the more likely they feel anxiety or stress and report lower levels of life satisfaction (Sart & Sezgin, 2025). Moreover, people with FOMO tend to follow their social media heavily, leading to impaired daily activities that can also limit their interactions with others in the real world and consequently, their well-being (Jabeen et al., 2023). There have been conflicting results regarding the link between social media use and life satisfaction.

Some studies indicate positive effects, suggesting that social media enhances communication, strengthens social networks, and fosters emotional support and a sense of belonging (Huang et al., 2021; Pang, 2022). In contrast, other research highlights negative outcomes, demonstrating that excessive or passive social media use can reduce subjective well-being due to increased social comparison and unrealistic portrayals of others' lives (Chnaider et al., 2022; Verduyn et al., 2020).

Previous research in Western countries has indicated that there is a negative relationship between FOMO and wellbeing, such that people who report higher FOMO experience lower levels of life satisfaction, greater levels of anxiety and poorer emotional wellbeing (Buglass et al., 2017; Przybylski et al., 2013). The results are typically attributed to social comparison theory, which suggests that frequent viewing of idealized other people's lives on social media can heighten insecurities and dissatisfaction. The cultural and social context of Pakistani youth, however, can foster different dynamics; social media interaction can also serve as a means of social bonding, peer connection and collective relationships. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, participating in social networks could have an impact on awareness of social network activities as well as increasing the sense of social connectedness and belonging, which could lead to increased FOMO and increased life satisfaction (Ghai et al., 2022). In this sense, the connection between FOMO and life satisfaction may not always be consistently negative as seen in many studies conducted in western countries.



Although many studies have addressed this topic, much remains to be understood about how FOMO operates as a mediating variable between the two primary variables of interest in this study: social media intensity and life satisfaction. University students are an important population for this research because they are typically among the most active users of social media and are also commonly exposed to considerable social pressures and academic demands during a major developmental transition (Uram & Skalski, 2020). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among university students' social media intensity, FOMO, and overall life satisfaction. In addition to these relations, this research investigates the role FOMO plays as a mediator, as well as understanding how the use of patterns of social media can impact an individual's overall wellbeing in our digital society.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed in this study was quantitative with a cross-sectional survey design, to identify the relationships between the social media intensity, fear of missing out (FOMO), and life satisfaction of university students. Quantitative research was the method used because the constructs could be measured by using standardized instruments, and the relationship between the constructs could be evaluated statistically. In this study, social media intensity was used as an independent variable, FOMO as a mediated variable, and life satisfaction as a dependent variable. The study also explored the differences between men and women in the measurement of FOMO and social media intensity among the university students.

3.2 Population of Study

The target population in this research was University students pursuing their studies in universities. Therefore, university students were selected as the target group for this study because they are high social media users and much more vulnerable towards social comparison and fear of missing out. The examination of this population also additionally provided an opportunity to investigate the relationship between social media and psychological well-being at a developmental stage.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used in the study. Participants were recruited from university students by using online questionnaires. The sample size of 300 respondents was sufficient to reach a strong statistical power in conducting correlation and mediation studies. The answers given by individuals were presented in a limited review based on complete and valid responses only, and incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final review.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data was gathered from an online questionnaire from Google Forms. A survey was distributed through academic networks and online communication technologies among university students in one of the areas. Participants were exposed to all information about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of the participation, and the confidentiality of the answers before they completed surveys. All Respondents were provided with an opportunity to respond to all the questions asked. The final analysis involved only full-filled questionnaires, and partially filled ones were eliminated during screening of data.

3.5 Research Instrument

The study tool was a structured questionnaire that had two primary sections, namely, demographics and standardized measurement scales

3.5.1 Demographic Information

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to obtain information about demographics. These features encompassed age, gender, most-used social media, and the average hours spent per day on social media. Those variables were used for the description of the study sample.

3.5.2 Social Media Intensity

The intensity of social media was determined with the Social Media Intensity Scale that was formulated by Ellison et al. (2007). The scale was comprised of eight questions that measure emotional attachment and degree of involvement of social media as per individuals. Respondents answered every item based on a Likert-type response scale that stipulates how much they agreed with each statement. The more social media was used, the higher score on scale.

In this study, the internal consistency of the Social Media Intensity (SMI) scale was good but slightly below threshold (Cronbach's $\alpha = .685$). This relatively low reliability may be due to the mixed response format within the scale. Items 1-6 use a standard Likert-type agreement scale, whereas items 7 and 8 use a different scale for the number of social media friends/followers and the time spent on social media, respectively. Overall, internal consistency could have been reduced by the fact that these were presented in different formats and combined in a composite score. To prevent the two non-Likert items (items 7 and 8) from dominating the composite, all eight items were standardized (z-scored) before averaging in the present analyses, consistent with the original scoring approach of Ellison et al. (2007). However, the scale was kept with it being widely used in previous social media research (Ellison et al., 2007). Future studies could use a more consistent response style or explore behavioral measures as well as emotional engagement measures separately to increase the likelihood of the measures being reliable.

3.5.3 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO), developed by Przybylski et al. (2013), was used to measure fear of missing out. The instrument comprises 10 items measuring the concerns and anxiety of missing out on rewarding experiences that other people are likely undergoing. Each participant responded to every statement on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 according to how true they felt each statement was, with higher scores indicating a higher level of FOMO. None of the 10 items was scored backwards as per the scale guidelines. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .808$), and the reliability was satisfactory. The FOMO scale has been applied in past studies of social media behaviors, psychological well-being, and online social comparison processes.

3.5.4 Life Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) in which Diener et al. (1985) outlined satisfaction with life was used in assessing life satisfaction. The scale had five items which assessed overall cognitive estimation of satisfaction of life by individuals. Participants answered using a Likert-type scale in which higher scores indicated a greater level of satisfaction with life.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data obtained were analyzed in the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis was done in a number of steps. Descriptive statistics were calculated in first place to summarize the demographic and general response of participants. Second, the internal consistency of measurement scales was checked with the help of reliability analysis in terms of Cronbach alpha. Third, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to investigate relations among social media intensity, FOMO, and life satisfaction. Fourth, mediation analysis was done to show whether FOMO mediated the relationship between social media intensity and life



satisfaction. Lastly, t-tests of independent samples were done to investigate differences among genders in extent of FOMO and social media intensity. Statistical significance was determined at a significance level of $p < 0.05$ in all analyses.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were upheld during the research process. Respondents were fully aware of what study was about, and the purpose of study was done well before they would fill in questionnaires, which was entirely voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were ensured, and no information that was personally identifiable was gathered. Data was simply for academic and research purposes only.

Results

This section presents findings from the quantitative analysis of data collected from $N = 307$ university students. Results are presented in the following order: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) reliability analysis, (3) descriptive statistics, (4) correlation analysis addressing H1 and H2, (5) mediation analysis addressing H3, and (6) gender-based group differences addressing H4. All analyses used SPSS 27 with a two-tailed significance threshold of $\alpha = .05$.

4.1 Sample Demographics

Table 1 presents the demographic and platform characteristics of the sample. The largest group was male (46.6%, $n = 143$), followed by female respondents (39.1%, $n = 120$), with 10.1% ($n = 31$) preferring not to disclose their gender and 4.2% ($n = 13$) identifying as Other. Most participants fell into the 18–22 (32.6%, $n = 100$) and 23–27 (33.6%, $n = 103$) age bands, reflecting a young adult university population. Educational attainment was varied, with a bachelor's degree being the most common qualification (38.4%, $n = 118$). Instagram was the most frequently used primary platform (42.0%, $n = 129$), followed by WhatsApp (22.5%, $n = 69$) and TikTok (15.6%, $n = 48$), a pattern that differs from many Western samples and may reflect Pakistani digital media habits.

Table 1

Sample Demographic and Platform Characteristics (N = 307)

Category	n	%
Gender		
Male	143	46.6%
Female	120	39.1%
Prefer not to say	31	10.1%
Other	13	4.2%
Age		
18-22 years	100	32.6%
23-27 years	103	33.6%
28-32 years	60	19.5%
33-37 years	27	8.8%
38+ years	17	5.5%
Education		



Category	n	%
Intermediate	77	25.1%
Bachelor's	118	38.4%
Master's	70	22.8%
MPhil	27	8.8%
PhD	15	4.9%
Primary Platform		
Instagram	129	42.0%
WhatsApp	69	22.5%
TikTok	48	15.6%
Facebook	45	14.7%
Other	16	5.2%

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was computed for each scale to assess internal consistency; results are presented in Table 2. The FOMO scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .808$, $k = 10$). The SMI scale showed borderline-adequate reliability ($\alpha = .685$, $k = 8$), which may be attributable to items 7 and 8 (number of friends and average daily time) using a different response format from the five-point Likert items (1–6). The SWLS likewise showed borderline reliability ($\alpha = .690$, $k = 5$). The SMI and SWLS values fall slightly below the conventional .70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978) and are acknowledged as a limitation. All three scales were retained for analysis given their widespread, validated use in prior research.

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients for Study Measures

Scale	Items	N	α	Benchmark	Interpretation
Social Media Intensity (SMI)	8	307	.685	$\geq .70$	Borderline adequate
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	10	307	.808	$\geq .70$	Good
Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	5	307	.690	$\geq .70$	Borderline adequate

Note. Cronbach's alpha benchmarks: $\geq .90$ = excellent, $\geq .80$ = good, $\geq .70$ = acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). SMI reliability may be underestimated due to mixed response formats across items.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents item-level and composite descriptive statistics. Participants reported moderate FOMO ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.75$) and moderate life satisfaction ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.83$), with both composite means close to the scale midpoint (3). It indicated that the sample was neither particularly high nor low on these constructs. Because the eight Social Media Intensity items used three different response formats, they were standardized (z-scored) before being averaged (see Section 3.5.2); the resulting SMI composite is therefore expressed in standardized units ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.59$), with item-level means clustering near the midpoints of their respective



scales. Among the FOMO items, "It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet friends" had the highest mean ($M = 3.02$) and "I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me" the lowest ($M = 2.61$). For the SWLS, "I am satisfied with my life" had the highest mean ($M = 3.18$) and "My life is close to my ideal" the lowest ($M = 2.55$).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics: Scale Items and Composites

Scale / Item	M	SD
SOCIAL MEDIA INTENSITY (8 items; standardized for composite)		
Social media is part of my everyday activity	2.723	1.293
I am proud to tell people I am on social media	2.717	1.147
Social media has become part of my daily routine	2.886	1.312
I feel out of touch when I have not logged on	2.746	1.253
I feel part of the social media community	2.909	1.290
I would be sorry if social media shut down	2.977	1.325
No. of social media friends/followers (1-7 scale)	5.101	2.299
Average time per day on social media (1-6 scale)	3.609	1.612
SMI Composite (standardized)	0.00	0.59
FEAR OF MISSING OUT (10 items, 1-5 scale)		
I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me	2.606	1.265
I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences	2.736	1.185
I get worried when friends are having fun without me	2.824	1.224
I get anxious when I do not know what friends are up to	2.756	1.208
It is important to understand my friends' in-jokes	2.853	1.221
I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up	2.938	1.244
It bothers me when I miss a meet-up opportunity	3.016	1.227
When I have a good time, I share details online	2.720	1.196
When I miss a get-together, it bothers me	2.922	1.226
On vacation I keep tabs on what friends are doing	2.902	1.325
FOMO Composite Mean	2.827	0.746
SATISFACTION WITH LIFE, SWLS (5 items, 1-5 scale)		
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	2.547	1.226
The conditions of my life are excellent	3.101	1.229
I am satisfied with my life	3.176	1.197
I have gotten the important things I want in life	2.827	1.239
If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	2.899	1.318
SWLS Composite Mean	2.910	0.830

Note. FOMO and SWLS composites are item means. Because SMI items used three different response formats (items 1-6 on a 1-5 scale, item 7 on a 1-7 scale, item 8 on a 1-6 scale), all eight SMI items were standardized (z-scored) before averaging, following Ellison et al. (2007); the SMI composite is therefore reported in standardized units ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.59$).

4.4 Correlation Analysis (H1 and H2)

Pearson correlations among the three main variables are presented in Table 4. H1 predicted a positive relationship between SMI and FOMO. This was strongly confirmed: $r(305) = .48$, $p < .001$. Higher social media intensity was significantly associated with higher fear of missing out, indicating that students who are more deeply integrated into social media use experience greater anxiety about missing out on others' activities. This is a medium-to-large effect (Cohen, 1988) and represents the strongest finding in the study.

H2 predicted a negative relationship between FOMO and life satisfaction. However, the observed correlation was $r(305) = +.13$, $p = .022$, statistically significant but positive in direction, contrary to H2. This unexpected positive association suggests that FOMO and life satisfaction do not have the anticipated inverse relationship in this Pakistani student sample. This may reflect that social media engagement, even when accompanied by FOMO, serves as a social bonding mechanism that enhances rather than reduces overall life satisfaction in this cultural context. H2 is therefore not supported in its predicted direction.

SMI also showed a small but significant positive association with SWLS, $r(305) = .22$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher social media engagement was associated with marginally higher life satisfaction.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Matrix: SMI, FOMO, and SWLS

Variable	1. SMI	2. FOMO	3. SWLS	M	SD
1. Social Media Intensity (SMI)	,	.48***	.22***	0.00	0.59
2. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)		,	.13*	2.83	0.75
3. Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)			,	2.91	0.83

Note. $N = 307$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). All observed correlations are positive; H2 predicted a negative FOMO-SWLS correlation.

4.5 Regression Analysis

Three simple linear regressions were conducted to quantify the individual predictive relationships. As shown in Table 5, SMI significantly predicted FOMO ($B = 0.61$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .48$, $t(305) = 9.65$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .23$, $F(1, 305) = 93.09$). FOMO modestly predicted SWLS ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .13$, $t(305) = 2.30$, $p = .022$, $R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 305) = 5.27$), though the very small R^2 indicates FOMO explains less than 2% of the variance in life satisfaction. SMI directly predicted SWLS ($B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = .22$, $t(305) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 305) = 14.86$).

Table 5

Simple Linear Regressions: Predicting FOMO and Life Satisfaction

Predictor Outcome	→ B	SE B	β	t	p	R ²	F
SMI → FOMO	0.61	0.06	.48	9.65	< .001	.23	$F(1, 305) = 93.09$, $p < .001$



Predictor Outcome	→ B	SE B	β	t	p	R ²	F
FOMO → SWLS	0.15	0.06	.13	2.30	.022	.02	$F(1, 305) = 5.27, p = .022$
SMI → SWLS	0.30	0.08	.22	3.85	< .001	.05	$F(1, 305) = 14.86, p < .001$

Note. N = 307. β = standardized regression coefficient. All predictors entered separately in simple regression models.

4.6 Mediation Analysis: FOMO as Mediator (H3)

H3 proposed that FOMO mediates the relationship between SMI and life satisfaction. The Baron and Kenny (1986) causal steps approach was used to assess mediation. Table 6 presents the results for each step.

Step 1 (path c): SMI significantly predicted SWLS, $B = 0.30, \beta = .22, p < .001$. Step 2 (path a): SMI significantly predicted FOMO (the proposed mediator), $B = 0.61, \beta = .48, p < .001$. Step 3 (path b): FOMO significantly predicted SWLS, $B = 0.15, \beta = .13, p = .022$. However, a critical requirement for mediation is that the mediator (FOMO) must remain significant when the predictor (SMI) is controlled. In Step 4 (full model with both SMI and FOMO predicting SWLS), FOMO was not significant, $B = 0.04, SE = 0.07, t = 0.53, p = .595$, while SMI remained significant, $B = 0.28, SE = 0.09, t = 3.11, p = .002$. The full model explained $R^2 = .05$ of the variances. A bootstrap test of the indirect effect (10,000 resamples) confirmed the absence of mediation: the standardized indirect effect of SMI on SWLS through FOMO was $ab = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.05, .09]$, with the confidence interval including zero. These results indicate that H3 is NOT supported: FOMO does not mediate the SMI-SWLS relationship. The direct effect of SMI on SWLS persists independently of FOMO.

Table 6

Mediation Analysis: Baron & Kenny Causal Steps (H3)

Step	Path	B	SE	β / b	t	p	Verdict
Step 1	SMI → SWLS (c path)	0.30	0.08	.22	3.85	< .001	Significant
Step 2	SMI → FOMO (a path)	0.61	0.06	.48	9.65	< .001	Significant
Step 3	FOMO → SWLS (b path)	0.15	0.06	.13	2.30	.022	Significant
Step 4	SMI → SWLS controlling FOMO (c' path)	0.28	0.09	.20	3.11	.002	Significant
Step 4	FOMO → SWLS controlling SMI (b' path)	0.04	0.07	.03	0.53	.595	Not significant
Overall Mediation (H3)				$R^2 = .05$			NOT SUPPORTED

Note. Mediation requires significant a, b, and b' paths. Since FOMO (b') is non-significant when SMI is controlled ($p = .595$), full mediation is not established. SMI has a direct effect on SWLS that is independent of FOMO.

4.7 Gender Differences in SMI and FOMO (H4)

H4 proposed significant gender differences in social media intensity and FOMO. One-way ANOVAs compared three gender groups (Male, Female, prefer not to say) on both SMI and FOMO. The results are presented in Table 7.

For SMI, the ANOVA was not statistically significant, $F(2, 291) = 2.539$, $p = .080$. Although male respondents ($M = 3.307$) reported slightly higher SMI than female respondents ($M = 3.077$), this difference did not reach statistical significance. For FOMO, the ANOVA was also not significant, $F(2, 291) = 1.582$, $p = .207$. Both findings indicate that gender does not significantly differentiate social media intensity or fear of missing out in this Pakistani university student sample. H4 is not supported.

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA: Gender Differences in SMI and FOMO (H4)

Variable	Gender Group	n	M	SD	F	df	p
SMI	Male	143	3.307	0.830	2.539	2, 291	.080
	Female	120	3.077	0.894			
	Prefer not to say	31	3.266	0.606			
FOMO	Male	143	2.800	0.759	1.582	2, 291	.207
	Female	120	2.779	0.777			
	Prefer not to say	31	3.042	0.588			

Note. H4 is not supported. No statistically significant gender differences were found for either SMI or FOMO. The trend of "Prefer not to say" group showing higher FOMO ($M = 3.042$) warrants future investigation but does not reach significance with this sample size.

4.8 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 8

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Key Statistical Result	Decision
H1: SMI positively related to FOMO	$r(305) = .48$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .48$, $R^2 = .23$	SUPPORTED (strong effect)
H2: FOMO negatively related to SWLS	$r(305) = +.13$, $p = .022$ (positive, not negative)	NOT SUPPORTED , direction opposite to prediction
H3: FOMO mediates SMI → SWLS	FOMO non-significant in full model ($p = .595$); direct SMI effect persists	NOT SUPPORTED , no mediation
H4: Gender differences in SMI and FOMO	SMI: $F(2,291) = 2.539$, $p = .080$; FOMO: $F(2,291) = 1.582$, $p = .207$	NOT SUPPORTED , no significant differences

Note. H1 is well substantiated. H2, H3, and H4 are not supported as expected. The surprising positive relationship between FOMO and SWLS is a theoretical discovery and needs discussion within the framework of digital culture and social media behavior in Pakistan.



Discussion

In this current research paper, the relation between social media intensity - FOMO - and life satisfaction among university students has been made the topic of research. In doing so, results offer insights into the effects of social media usage on psychological experiences in a digitally connected but not fully immersive context.

Participants had moderate social media intensity, FOMO, and life satisfaction. Analyses also indicated a high correlation between variables, especially between social media intensity and FOMO. Results align with existing literature that indicate that patterns of digital interactions have potential to affect emotional well-being and social perception (Soraci et al., 2025).

The demographic characteristic of the sample was that most of them were young adults aged 18 to 27. This allocation is based on age brackets that are most active in social networking sites across the world. Past research findings indicated that university students and young adults are the most active and largest group of social media users due to their use of digital media to interact, communicate, and exchange information (Mihailidis, 2014). Young adults are also more prone to social comparison and peer influence online than their older counterparts because of their age and practice of social networking (Ahn, 2011).

Results on use of the platform indicated that Instagram was the most common platform among respondents. This is consistent with worldwide social media consumption, as TikTok and Instagram, which are mostly image-based platforms, are rising in popularity with younger generations (Aichner et al., 2021). These networks will prioritize visual storytelling, social feedback, and lifestyle representation, which can amplify social comparison and perceived social competition between their users (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). Such platforms are designed in ways that promote users to showcase edited images of their own lives, which can impact the way other users appraise their own lives and their own accomplishments (Fox & Vendemia, 2016).

Descriptive outcomes of social media intensity showed that respondents exhibited moderate use of social media sites. Quite a number of participants had neutral reactions to emotional attachment to social networking sites. This leads one to suggest that social media is not always a strong indicator of psychological dependency, despite being a daily routine of communication among individuals. The same study conducted by previous researchers has also discovered that social media usage among people differs largely among different individuals based on their own motivations, habits, and patterns of using the internet (Ellison et al., 2007). Users are either mostly communicative or informational or more rampant in using platforms as identity expression or social validation (Zhakin, 2023).

Results on characteristics of social media usage showed that a significant number (100-200 social media connections) of respondents dedicated about 31-60 minutes a day on social media. Nevertheless, a large percentage of respondents said that they spend over two hours daily on the internet. Research indicates that more time on social media makes people more exposed to high amounts of social information, which could promote the possibility of comparison with others and perceived social competition (Kross et al., 2013). This exposure can develop how people view their life situations and lead to affective reactions to belonging and inclusion (Vogel et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2023).

Mean scores of the Fear of Missing Out scale suggested that the situation was moderate in terms of FOMO levels among participants. A few respondents stated that it was moderately true that they feared people were having more fulfilling experiences than they did themselves.



Findings are in line with conceptualization of FOMO as a psychological reaction that relates to fears of social inclusion and engagement in rewarding pursuits (Przybylski et al., 2013). Self-determination theory states that people possess relatedness, competence, and autonomy as basic psychological needs, and lack of them can predispose them to FOMO (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These experiences could be aggravated by social media environments, which keeps people updated on what others do and accomplish (Alt, 2017).

Results also indicated that participants frequently manifested fear of missing social events or a lack of knowledge about what their friends were doing. Findings can be aligned with prior studies, indicating that FOMO is intimately related to social comparison procedures and needs to stay perpetually connected with other people (Tandon et al., 2021). Social interactions can be monitored at all times with use of social media, which in turn could intensify fear of missing enjoyable experiences (Burnell et al., 2019). Such unremitting exposure may make people believe that others are living a better life, which might not necessarily be true (Yue et al., 2022).

The results of life satisfaction implied that respondents exhibited moderate degrees of overall life satisfaction. Numerous respondents chose to be neutral when determining their general life situations and personal success. Same trends have been observed in past studies which have looked at subjective well-being amongst university students, with many reporting that life satisfaction tends to vary according to academic pressure, social expectations, and life transition stages (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017). The developmental stage of young adulthood is marked by identity exploration and professional indecisiveness, and it can lead to ambivalent opinions of life satisfaction (Graça & Brandão, 2024).

Correlation analysis showed that there was a strong positive correlation between social media intensity and FOMO. This fact allows us to support the first hypothesis and indicates that those people are more prone to fear of missing out because they use social media platforms more frequently. Past research has also observed that greater exposure to online social information has potential to further enhance awareness of actions of others as well as perception of social exclusion sensitivity (Sewall et al., 2022). Often, visiting social networking sites could then raise chances of developing FOMO as people are subjected to constant social feed (Jabeen et al., 2023).

Regression analysis further verified that intensity of social media had a significant predictive power on FOMO and accounted for about 23.4% of variation. This outcome highlights the significance of online interaction patterns in the development of psychological experiences. Previous research has also shown that those who visit social media websites on a regular basis are ones who report increased levels of FOMO and compulsive social media consumption (Roberts & David, 2019). Such results indicate that social media spaces can potentially strengthen patterns of checking and monitoring.

Surprisingly, outcomes indicated that there was a small but statistically significant positive correlation between life satisfaction and FOMO. This result is contrary to most past researchers who have found that FOMO is negatively linked to psychological well-being (Fioravanti et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are those scholars who have indicated that moderate use of social media can also support social connectivity and connectivity to supportive networks (Hillyer, 2021). In this regard, even those who have moderate degrees of FOMO might stay connected and social, and this might lead to some well-being factors.

However, the tendency to feel FOMO was positive and not negative, in relation to life satisfaction ($r = +.13, p = .022$) (as in H2). Surprisingly, this is not the typical result of the vast

body of literature on FOMO in the West, where greater impatience has been linked to poorer well-being and lower life satisfaction. The social capital role of social media in Pakistani society may be one of the reasons. However, if the social system is collectivist, and the FOMO level is moderate, students can also be more socially involved, have tighter ties with peers, and be more active on online social networks, which can have a positive impact on their reported life satisfaction. FOMO can be a symptom of anxiety about exclusion as well as a need for social belonging and social connectedness. This is in line with the argument of Valkenburg et al. (2021) that the psychological impact on well-being from social media use is more related to the functions performed in social media than to the quantity of use. Thus, social media involvement can also raise awareness of social events and enhance inter-personal connection feeling among university students in Pakistan. Future studies could explore the consistency of this positive relationship between FOMO and life satisfaction across different cultural settings, socio-economic status and age groups of Pakistan.

The second reason could be that people who regularly visit social media might be more socially updated and connected with networks of peers. Social media sites have potential to enhance human social ties and keep in touch with friends and relatives in different geographical locations (Al-Jbouri et al., 2024). Social media can have a positive impact on perceived well-being and life satisfaction when it is applied to maintain relationships and receive social support (Ostic et al., 2021).

Although this was a positive relationship, the regression model revealed that FOMO had only a small percentage of variance in life satisfaction. This result indicates that life satisfaction is affected by a combination of various psychological, social, and situational factors other than experiences on social media. Past studies revealed that personality traits, academic stress, social support, and economic conditions are factors that predict life satisfaction (Raudenská, 2023). Hence, FOMO can be one of the numerous psychological mechanisms that affect the overall well-being of people.

The results of current research reveal that there is a complicated connection between social media use and psychological consequences. Levels of social media intensity seem to expose more people to social comparison and internet interaction, which leads to elevated levels of FOMO. Meanwhile, correlation between FOMO and life satisfaction can be different in terms of personal motivation, specificity of social media use, and situational situations that affect well-being (Uram & Skalski, 2020).

Taken together, the hypothesis testing results show only partial support for the proposed model. H1 was strongly supported, with social media intensity emerging as a strong and consistent predictor of FOMO. H2, H3, and H4, however, were not supported in the directions originally predicted: FOMO was positively rather than negatively associated with life satisfaction, it did not mediate the relationship between social media intensity and life satisfaction, and no significant gender differences emerged in either variable. Rather than undermining the value of the study, this pattern of findings is informative. Much of the theorizing that informed H2 and H3 was developed using samples from individualist Western contexts, where heavy social media use and FOMO have more consistently been linked to social withdrawal and reduced well-being. The present results suggest that in a collectivist setting such as Pakistan, where social media may function more as an extension of existing peer and family networks, FOMO does not operate in the same way and may even co-occur with continued social engagement. The non-significant gender effect (H4) similarly suggests that, among Pakistani university students, exposure to and emotional response to social media

may be shaped more by shared peer culture than by gender alone. These findings therefore extend rather than simply replicate prior models, and they highlight the need for further testing of Western-derived frameworks of social media use and well-being in non-Western populations before assuming their universality.

The current research paper will add to the growing body of literature on the concept of digital well-being by offering empirical data on dynamics of the psychological nature of using social media in context of university students. Since digital tools are still defining social interaction and communication, the role of social media use on emotional experiences and life satisfaction is still a crucial research topic.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several restrictions in the present study. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences; particularly, the mediation analysis (H3) reported the simultaneous roles of social media use and changes in FOMO and life satisfaction, while a temporal or experimental design would be required to establish if there is a causal link between social media use and life satisfaction changes yielding to changes in FOMO. Second, the sample were acquired using convenience sampling approach because of which it restricts generalizability to other groups such as other cultures other age ranges in other regions of Pakistan. Finally, the variables were self-reported, so there is a potential for social desirability and recall bias. Finally, the reliability of two of the three scales identified – Social Media Intensity Scale ($\alpha = .685$) and Satisfaction with Life Scale ($\alpha = .690$) – were both slightly below the commonly accepted .70 cut-off. Readers and readers in the future should therefore pay attention to the more dubious reliability of the measures when considering the significance of some of the associations (such as the small effect of FOMO on life satisfaction and non-significant mediation path) and interpret their effects in light of that.

Future studies should use a longitudinal design or an experimental design to determine the direction of relationships found in the current study and employ larger and more representative samples from various regions and institutions in Pakistan and include alternative or culturally sensitive versions of the SMI and SWLS to increase measurement accuracy. Further studies could also explore other factors (including the kind of social media use [active vs. passive influence], perceived social support, and self-esteem] referenced to suggest they may moderate or mediate the link between social media use and well-being. In conclusion, this study would help to know whether the positive correlation between FOMO and life satisfaction is present in collectivist countries like Pakistan and is a general trend or not; a trend being revealed by cross culture studies of other countries in which these variables are not studied.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the relationships between social media intensity, perceived fear of missing out (FOMO), and perceived life satisfaction among university students. The more people use social media in society, the more interested they are in the psychological effects of digital interaction. The results help to deepen the understanding of the multifaceted relationship between social media use and self-esteem. Although descriptive results depict that the participants had moderate intensity of social media, FOMO and life satisfaction. Most respondents highlighted frequent, but not excessive, frequency of use of social media applications, highlighting how important social media is to many young adults in the modern world. Instagram was the most mentioned app by respondents, and this is aligning with recent trends in digital communications amongst youth that have migrated towards photo-based platforms. Finally, for many people nowadays, especially the younger generation, social media



is a part of their social life. While it provides various options for users to engage with and communicate with people, there is also a need to consider the potential impact on psychological wellbeing. Social media, if used responsibly and wisely, may be beneficial for establishing positive well-being and fostering positive digital connections.

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