

From Fear of Missing Out to Belonging: How Social Media and Peer Pressure Shapes Conformity in Young Adults

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Abstract

Social media has become a pervasive force in shaping individual behaviours, yet little is known about the psychological factors driving conformity in this context. Drawing upon Social Influence Theory, which explains how individuals adjust their attitudes and behaviours under the influence of others, this study examines the predictive roles of the need to belong, fear of missing out, and peer pressure on social media usage, while exploring how this usage promotes conformity among young adults. The study addresses a critical research gap by investigating the mediating role of social media usage in these relationships. Data were collected through an online survey from a purposive sample of 471 young adults (58% females, 42% males; $M = 19.91$, $SD = \pm 2.23$), predominantly undergraduate and graduate students from diverse educational institutions in Pakistan. The sample size was determined based on recommendations for path analysis, ensuring sufficient power to detect meaningful relationships. Path analysis revealed that fear of missing out and peer pressure positively predicted social media usage, whereas the need to belong negatively predicted it. Social media usage had a direct effect on conformity and mediated the relationships between the fear of missing out and conformity, as well as the need to belong and conformity. However, its mediating role between peer pressure and conformity was non-significant. These findings shed light on the interplay of psychological factors driving social media behaviour, emphasizing the phenomenon of digital-age conformity and its implications for understanding online social dynamics.

Keywords: Digital Age Conformity, Fear of Missing Out, Need to Belong, Peer Pressure, Social Media Usage

INTRODUCTION

Since digital media use has become so popular these days, it is rare to find someone who doesn't use social media. Media statistics indicate that billions of users use different social networking sites to enter the digital era. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter are widely used to connect users (Ahad, & Anshari, 2017). These digital platforms serve not just as channels for interpersonal interaction, but also create settings that considerably impact user behaviour and decision-making processes, notably in terms of conformity. According to the Use and Gratification Model, people get satisfaction when they use technology to fulfil their inner desires, such as seeking approval or feeling a sense of belongingness (Katz et al., 2012). Nonetheless, despite the widespread use of these platforms in daily life, insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to their effects on conformity, a behavioural phenomenon in which individuals adjust their actions or attitudes in response to the presence of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

When people perceive that having something is desirable while not having it is uncomfortable, they feel an urge to

achieve it (Ku et al., 2013). In sociability, when something is considered highly sociable, its lack is seen as a missed chance. Instant gratification and withdrawal act as antecedents to social networking site usage. Social motivation such as the number of sold-out items and exclusive products affects the user's buying intention (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2016). While extensive literature focuses on these mediums' pervasive adoption there is now a need to shift the attention toward broader issues including user's posting behaviour, time spent on virtual mediums, and psychological factors contributing to social media conformity (Yushi et al., 2018).

Traditional theories of compliance and conformity have concentrated on face-to-face interactions, but the digital sphere introduces a great deal of complexity. Online communication's asynchronous and anonymous features lessen accountability and make it more likely that people may readily express opposing opinions or behaviours (Wijenayake et al., 2020b). In digital environments, normative and informational influence two fundamental concepts of social influence theory remain especially

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pertinent. While normative influence pushes people to comply to be accepted or prevent rejection, informational influence is founded on the desire to follow those who are seen to possess superior knowledge (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). In the digital domain, these effects appear as interactions such as likes, shares, and comments, in which users seek validation and approval. Social media platforms enhance these dynamics by creating environments favourable for self-comparison and validation (Chin et al. 2015). Thus, there is a significant gap in our understanding of how psychological factors such as fear of missing out, peer pressure, and the need to belong contribute to conformity in these digital contexts. Addressing this gap is critical for understanding the larger societal implications of conformity in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impacts of social media on conformity have been thoroughly documented, but they remain largely unexplored in specific sociocultural contexts, such as Pakistan. The loss of authenticity in favour of controlled online identities exacerbates conformity, as individuals, particularly young adults, adhere to prevalent digital norms in order to acquire social approval (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Since people who are exposed to social media at an early age are more inclined to adhere to social norms, the loss of identity in the digital age presents significant problems (Allen, 2019).

Several research has documented the link between conformity and social media usage. For instance, Al-Debei (2014), noted that consumers' intention to use social media is influenced by others as they follow peer's recommendations when making decisions. Similarly, food bloggers influence readers' perceptions affecting their food preferences (Tussyadiah et al., 2015). Moreover, online conformity is linked to the number of likes and comments by peers, as people feel more confident when their opinions align with those of the referent group (Egebarak & Ekstorm, 2011).

Several factors can lead to conformity, such as the need for social cohesion, acceptance, perceived personal ignorance, fear of missing out, and peer pressure (Bocian et al., 2024; Kang & Shin, 2020). While conformity can promote social cohesion and cooperation, it can also stifle individuality and critical thinking (Leviton & Verhulst, 2016) because of that it remains a crucial research topic in social psychology as it sheds light on how people develop views and behaviour within social groups. Societal influence theories, particularly the Social Influence Theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) suggest that people change behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs to meet societal standards or expectations, consistent with social media's effect on conformity (Wijenayake et al., 2020a). Social media platforms provide users with vast information, perspectives, and trends, fostering a culture of uniformity (Chen, & Zhuang, 2024). Other studies have suggested that these platforms enable people to regularly acquire prevalent attitudes, behaviours, and values through mechanisms like peer pressure, social comparison, and the need for acceptance (Wong et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2016). Understanding how social media encourages conformity is vital for recognizing its broader societal implications and developing strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences.

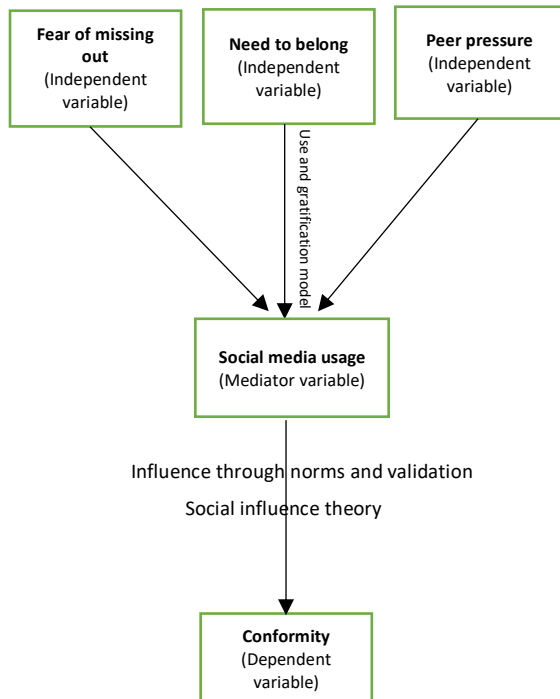
One of the factors that potentially leads to conformity is fear of missing out characterized by an apprehensive disappointment over others experiencing fulfilling things. This need drives people to adopt the latest trends to feel included (Przybylski et al., 2013). For example, a study on Flemish teenagers found that fear of missing out significantly predicts problematic social media usage and pubbing behaviour (Franchina et al., 2018). Other studies have found that smartphone addiction is largely driven by this interpersonal trait, which creates an overwhelming need to use social media (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Another contributing factor is peer pressure which drives people to emulate their social counterparts' attitudes and actions to fit in or avoid social exclusion (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Many young people join various online platforms and learn about social networking sites from friends to escape rejection and shame (Palaniswamy & Ponnuswami, 2013). According to Tussyadiah (2015), people often form perspectives based on the beliefs and behaviours of reference groups. Consequently, they take other's advice in everyday matters such as dining out, purchasing online, or reading blogs (Wang, 2011). Lastly, people are driven by a fundamental need to belong, aligning their attitudes and behaviours with those of social groups to maintain social bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social media, allows people to form online communities and join virtual groups (Seidman, 2013). Studies have shown that the desire to belong motivates individuals to use platforms like Instagram (Lee et al., 2015). Other studies confirm that digital platforms, texting, and photo-sharing features enable frequent engagement with like-minded individuals helping them cultivate a sense of belongingness (Liu et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2019). This paper is the first of its kind in the scientific literature to explore psychological factors' influence on online conformity in Pakistan integrating factors typically analyzed separately in prior research (Almohaimmed, 2019).

This study combines the Social Influence Theory (SIT) and the Use and Gratification Model (UGM) to develop a coherent framework that explains the psychological factors that drive conformity. Social Influence Theory emphasizes the importance of social norms, compliance with group expectations, and the power of perceived expertise in shaping behaviour. It proposes that people match their beliefs and behaviours with those of their social groups in order to maintain their approval and avoid rejection. This idea is consistent with the study's examination of the innate need to belong, the fear of missing out, and the impact of peer pressure, as these factors basically embody the need to conform to perceived social norms (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). In contrast, the Use and Gratification Model investigates the psychological drivers that drive social media engagement, shedding light on why people actively immerse themselves in social platforms to fulfil specific desires such as seeking affirmation, easing loneliness, or maintaining connections. UGM provides a theoretical framework for understanding how Fear of missing out, the need to belong, and peer pressure drive social media usage, which, in turn, promotes conformity by increasing exposure to societal norms and trends (Katz et al., 2012). By combining SIT and UGM, this study provides a systematic framework in which psychological motivators (FoMo, peer pressure, and the need to belong) drive social media involvement (as defined by UGM), which then promotes conformity through the dynamics outlined by SIT. This synthesis not only highlights

the personal motivations for using social media, but also explains how social media engagement heightens the need to adhere to societal or peer-group norms.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework illustrating the mediating role of social media usage in the relationships among fear of missing out, need to belong, and peer pressure, ultimately predicting conformity



Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

References supporting each construct include Przybylski et al. (2013), Baumeister and Leary (1995), Brown et al. (2008), and Cialdini and Goldstein (2004).

Hypotheses

H1: Fear of missing out, the need to belong and peer pressure are positively related to social media usage

H2: Social media usage is positively related to conformity

H3: Social media usage will significantly mediate the relationship between fear of missing out, need to belong, peer pressure, and conformity

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The correlational research design is ideal for this investigation because it allows for the examination of relationships between variables such as social media usage, fear of missing out, peer pressure, need to belong, and conformity. This analytical approach provides unique insights into the naturally existing correlations between these factors, which aligns well with the study's aims (Curtis et al., 2016).

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Through the use of structured instruments and a survey technique, data were collected from 471 young adults (15-29) years. The calculation of sample size for the path analysis was executed utilizing the PASS (Power Analysis and Sample Size) software. In accordance with the predetermined

power of 0.80, an alpha threshold of 0.05, and a medium effect size, the required sample size was obtained. This calculation is vital to ensure adequate power to identify the anticipated relationships among the variables presented in the research (Hintze, 2011). A purposive sampling methodology was employed in this investigation to deliberately target young adults who are actively engaged with social media, thereby ensuring that the sample accurately mirrors the population of interest. This methodological approach facilitates a more concentrated examination of the interplay between social media usage and conformity among young adults in Pakistan (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

Out of 471 young adults ($M = 19.91$, $SD = \pm 2.23$), 58% were females and 42% were males. Most participants (67.7%) were aged 15-20 years, with 32.3% aged 21-29 years. The majority (76.9%) resided in urban areas, while 23.1% were from rural communities. Additionally, 71.1% were enrolled in public sector institutions, and 62% belonged to nuclear family systems. Responses were collected from various cities, including Multan (45.8%), Bahawalpur (23.3%), Vehari (4.0%), and Layyah (4.6%). For several reasons, this diverse sampling approach was critical. First, young adults qualify as the heaviest users of social networks, which would help observe the effects of digital conformity in depth. According to the Hogan (2022), the population that spends more time on social networks is 18-29 years old. Second, this age group is probably the most appropriate to research from a developmental perspective since issues of identity formation and social development are the most dominant in this age period. Specifically, young adults are influenced easily by their peers as they pass through the process of development from adolescence to adulthood while developing their own identities (Arnett, 2000). This susceptibility makes them more prone to mimic others' behaviours and conform to social norms. Given their pivotal role in shaping digital culture, studying young adults can provide early indicators of emerging conformity patterns that may become more widespread in the future (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Instruments

Fear of Missing Out Scale: The fear of missing out scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) assessed the extent to which people feared missing out on rewarding experiences and activities. The scale consists of 10 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale format, where participants were requested to indicate how frequently they experience the apprehensive fear of missing out, ranging from 1 (Not at all) to (Extremely). Items 1, 3, and 7 were reversed scores as without reverse scoring, respondents might tend to agree with all statements regardless of their actual experiences, which could distort the results. The score is treated as continuous and a higher score indicates a higher level of fear experienced by individuals. The reliability of the scale is .87 (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Need to Belong Scale: The need to belong scale developed by Leary et al. (2005) measured a person's desire for acceptance and belongingness. The scale consists of 10 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale format, where participants were requested to indicate how frequently they experience the need to belong to others, ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (extremely true of me). The score

is treated as continuous and a higher score indicates a higher level of belongingness experienced by individuals. The reliability of the scale is .70 (Leary et al., 2005).

Peer Pressure Scale: The peer pressure scale developed by Sunil and Sani, (2011) accessed pressure coming from peers in terms of antisocial activities and risky behaviour. According to the author, a peer is someone who, due to their age, grade, or status, is a member of the same social group as their cohorts and influences their thinking and behaviour. The scale consists of 25 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale format, where participants were requested to indicate how frequently they experience pressure from others, ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). The score is treated as continuous and a higher score indicates a higher level of peer pressure experienced by individuals. The reliability of the scale is .77 (Sunil, Sani & Goyal, 2011)

Social Media Usage Scale: The social media usage scale developed by Gupta and Bashir (2018) measures a person's general social media activity. The scale consists of 19 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale format, where participants were requested to indicate how frequently they use social media, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (always). The following four domains were specified by the author to access the overall usage. Academics (3, 8, 12,13,14,17 & 18). Socialization (1, 2, 6, 7 & 8), Entertainment (11, 15, 16, & 19), and Information, (4, 5 & 10). The score is treated as continuous and a higher score indicates a higher level of peer pressure experienced by individuals. The reliability of the scale is .83 (Gupta & Bashir, 2018).

Conformity Scale: The conformity scale developed by Mehrabian, (2005) measures a person's intentions (ideas, values, and behaviours) related to identifying with others, avoiding conflict, being a follower, and not being a leader. The scale consists of eleven items and uses a nine-point Likert scale format, where participants were requested to indicate how frequently they change their opinion, ranging from 1 to 9 where + 4 (very strong agreement), + 3 (strong agreement), + 2 (moderate agreement), + 1 (slight agreement), 0 (neither agreement nor disagreement), - 1 (slight disagreement), - 2 (moderate disagreement), - 3 (strong disagreement), and - 4 (very strong disagreement). Four items were reversed scores (1, 3, 7, 11). Reverse scoring minimises response biases, particularly in negatively worded items. The overall score was computed by dividing the total number of items by the sum of the positive items and the negative items. The reliability of the scale is .60 (Mehrabian, 2005)

Procedure

The study was carried out as per American Psychological Association guidelines, and the Institutional Review Board approved it (No: PSY-12195-2020). Only those respondents who met the requirements of being active social media users were chosen, and they were asked to respond to a few filter questions before completing the main survey. The following questions were asked: time spent on the internet, frequency of use, number of social networking sites, the favourite site, and purpose for using social media. Participants were invited to express their ideas via self-report measures because all of the study's constructs evaluated the user's perception, that is why this approach was effective. They were told to complete the questionnaire honestly and to

respond in the majority of instances, not how they would wish to respond. The survey would take 20 to 25 minutes to complete. In the end, the participants' responses' privacy was guaranteed. It was made sure that the risk of feeling uncomfortable while participating was not anticipated to be higher than what they would typically encounter regularly.

The data was analysed using Smart PLS 3.0. For descriptive analysis, non-parametric statistical tests were used. To measure the reliability of the scales Cronbach alpha test was used. Discriminant validity was accessed through the Hetrotrait-monotrait (HTMT) criterion. For hypothesis testing partial least square technique was used as it was a module-based technique that was used to calculate the proposed predictions, it also enhanced the deviation in dependent factors (Ringle et al., 2015). Thus, the partial least square technique was suitable for analysis as this study examines the direct and indirect relationships between psychological factors (fear of missing out, peer pressure, and need to belong), social media usage, and conformity

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis & Discriminant Validity: Hetrotrait-monotrait (HTMT) Criterion

Scales	Items	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3	4
1.Conformity	11	0.6				
2.Fear of missing out	10	0.7	0.34			
3.Need to belong	10	0.7	0.31	0.41		
4.Peer pressure	25	0.8	0.30	0.21	0.24	
5.Social media usage	19	0.8	0.39	0.20	0.27	0.23

Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Note: The acceptable range of the coefficient of alpha is 0.6-0.8 (Klein, 1999). The threshold value <0.9 (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015).

The results indicate that all the scale items have good internal consistency thus further analysis can be done. A coefficient alpha between 0.6 and 0.8 is considered acceptable as it indicates adequate internal consistency for scales in exploratory research, balancing reliability with the number of items and complexity of constructs (Klein, 1999). Discriminant validity analysis indicates that all the instruments have good validity.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Interscale Correlations (N = 471)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fear of missing out	—	0.26**	0.01	0.07	-0.04
2. Need to belong		—	-0.07	0.15**	0.07
3. Peer pressure			—	0.11**	0.09*
4. Social media usage				—	0.13**
5. Conformity					—
Mean	26.38	30.56	60.79	66.12	-0.17
SD	6.76	7.37	13.85	13.40	0.82

Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Note: SD= standard deviation, $p < 0.05^$, $p < 0.01^{**}$*

The correlation analysis showed that FoMo was positively correlated to need to belong ($r=.26^{**}$) and conformity was positively correlated to social media usage ($r=.13^{**}$) and peer pressure ($r=.09^{*}$). Additionally, social media usage was positively correlated to peer pressure ($r=.11^{*}$) but negatively correlated to need to belong ($r=.15^{**}$).

Table 3: predictive effects of fear of missing out, peer pressure, and need to belong on social media usage and conformity

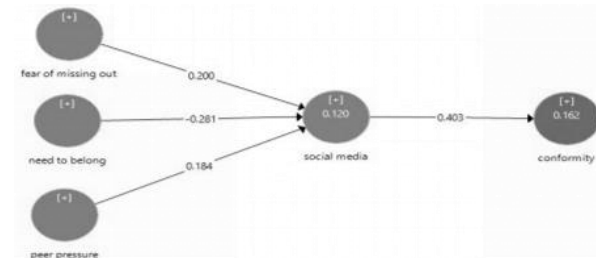
Paths	Beta	t-value	p-value	R ² -value	Decision
FOMO→SMU	0.20	2.21	0.028*		Accepted
NTB→SMU	-0.28	3.27	0.001***	0.12	Accepted
PP→SMU	0.18	2.36	0.019**		Accepted
SMU→CON	0.40	6.83	0.000***	0.16	Accepted

Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Note: CON = conformity, FOMO= fear of missing out, NTB= need to belong, PP=peer pressure, SMU= social media usage, $p<0.05^{*}$, $p<0.01^{**}$, $p<0.001^{***}$

The results of path analysis showed that fear of missing out and peer pressure positively predicted social media usage respectively ($\beta = 0.20$, $p = 0.02$), ($\beta = 0.18$, $P = 0.01$), indicating that a one-unit increase in the independent variable cause a one-unit increase in the dependent variable while the need to belong negatively predicted social media usage ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.0010$ indicating an inverse relationship. Thus as the need to belong increases the usage of social media decreases.

Figure 2: The structural model along with the r-squared value



Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Table 4: Direct and indirect effects of fear of missing out, the need to belong, and peer pressure on conformity mediated by social media usage (N = 471)

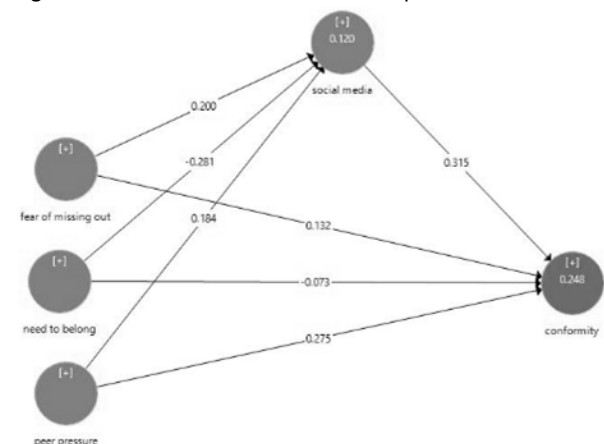
Effects	Paths	Beta	S.td	Indirect effects	Total effects	VAF	t-value	p-value	Decision
Direct Effect	FOMO→CON	0.185	0.320				0.579	0.563	
Indirect Effects	FOMO→CON	0.132	0.141				0.937	0.349	
	FOMO→SMU	0.200	0.087	0.063	0.195	0.32	2.303	0.022*	Partial mediation
	SMU→CON	0.315	0.085			(32%)	3.684	0.000***	
Direct Effect	PP→CON	0.403	0.289				1.392	0.165	
Indirect Effects	PP→CON	0.275	0.147				1.863	0.063	
	PP→SMU	0.184	0.089	0.058	0.333	0.174	2.078	0.036*	No mediation
	SMU→CON	0.315	0.085			(17%)	3.684	0.000***	
Direct Effect	NTB→CON	0.163	0.381				0.427	0.673	
Indirect Effects	NTB→CON	0.073	0.125				0.588	0.557	
	NTB→SMU	0.281	0.091	-0.088	-0.162	0.544	3.096	0.002*	Partial mediation
	SMU→CON	0.315	0.085			(54%)	3.684	0.000***	

Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Note: CON = conformity, FOMO= fear of missing out, NTB= need to belong, PP=peer pressure, SMU= social media usage, $p<0.05^{*}$, $p<0.01^{**}$, $p<0.001^{***}$. VAF (variance accounted for) value. ($VAF < 0.2$, no mediation; $0.2 \leq VAF \leq 0.8$, partial mediation; $VAF > 0.8$, full mediation). (Hair et al., 2017)

The results showed that social media significantly mediates the relationship between fear of missing out and conformity as a value of VAF (variance accounted for) is 0.323 ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.001$). Similarly, social media significantly mediates the relationship between the need to belong and conformity as the value of VAF is 0.544 ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.001$) but social media did not mediate the relationship between peer pressure, and conformity as the value of VAF is 0.174.

Figure 3: Structural model of mediation paths



Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Summary of Key Findings

Table 5: Summary of key findings

Hypothesis	Decision
H1: Fear of missing out, need to belong, and peer pressure are positively related to social media usage	Partially supported • Fear of missing out and peer pressure has a positive relationship with social media usage • Need to belong has a negative relationship with social media usage
H2: Social media usage is positively related to conformity	Supported
H3: Social media usage will significantly mediate the relationship between fear of missing out, need to belong, peer pressure, and conformity	Partially supported • Social media usage significantly mediated the relationship between the fear of missing out, the need to belong and conformity • It did not significantly mediate the relationship between peer pressure and conformity

Source: Developed by the authors, 2023

Discussion

The present study investigated the impact of fear of missing out, peer pressure, and the need to belong on social media usage among young adults. Additionally, it explored how social media fosters conformity and examined the mediating role of social media usage in this relationship. The first hypothesis under investigation examined the relationships between psychological factors such as fear of missing out, peer pressure, need to belong, and social media usage. Results provide partial support for this hypothesis with peer pressure being more strongly associated with social media usage (Sabadini, Rinaldi, & Guazzini, 2022). Given that peer pressure entails a desire to be part of the group, it is understandable that it would have a strong relationship to social media usage compared to fear of missing out. Peer pressure, particularly among adolescents, exerts additional influence by compelling individuals to meet peer expectations (Ku et al., 2013). This pressure encourages users to conform to perceived group norms, with social media serving as a mediator, that intensifies these pressures thereby increasing conformity (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011).

This finding aligns with previous literature as Wang (2011) found that the desire for peer acceptance often drives individuals to make decisions such as what to post, or which platforms to use. Adolescence is a period marked by heightened peer influence, where peer becomes the spotlight of a person's social life (Palaniswamy & Ponnuswami, 2013). Developmental psychologists also emphasize the importance of social influence on in-group and out-group affiliation during this stage of life (Al-Debei et al., 2014). The need to fit in energizes a person's behaviour to conform to different social norms even when such conformity may be detrimental to their psychological well-being (Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013).

Conversely, the need to belong while motivating increased social media usage, can paradoxically diminish uniqueness and drive conformity (Rocheleau & Shaughnessy, 2018). Although social media provides constant gratification,

excessive use can have a disabling effect, particularly on young adults. This finding suggests a negative feedback loop between social media usage and the desire to fit in, as prolonged use does not increase belongingness but rather diminishes it (Abrams et al., 2011). Prior research has also identified a connection between social networking site usage and depressive symptoms such as low mood, anxiety, and loneliness (Almohaimmed, 2019). The study also found that fear of missing out is a weak predictor of social media usage even though it drives people to engage with digital platforms frequently, thereby increasing conformity as they replicate online activities (Przybylski et al., 2013). Individuals experiencing fear of missing out are driven by a need to stay updated on other's activities and may become frustrated if they lose track. This anxiety stemming from a belief that others are having more rewarding experiences prompts them to maintain relationships with peers through social media (Brown & Kuss, 2020).

The second hypothesis posited that social media usage would significantly predict conformity. The result of the present research provided support for this hypothesis as social media usage indeed turned out as a positive predictor of conformity (Egebrark and Ekstorm, 2011). Although there exists a weak correlation ($r = 0.13$) between conformity and social media usage, there is a relationship, but it is not particularly strong. This finding aligns with previous research, which has shown that social media can influence conformity, but other factors, such as individual personality traits or offline social contexts, may play a more substantial role in shaping conforming behaviours (Wijenayake et al., 2020b). Therefore, further research is needed to explore additional variables that may contribute to this relationship. Conformity is particularly evident on online platforms where users assume that others on the same platform share similar interests (Tussyadiah et al., 2015). To remain part of the online group, individuals often feel compelled to adhere to the platform terms and conditions and align with the behaviour of the referent group. Over time, this conformity becomes permanent and the behaviour continues to show even in the absence of the referent group. (Wijenayake et al., 2020a)

The final hypothesis of the present study posited a mediating role of social media usage between fear of missing out, need to belong, peer pressure, and conformity. The result of the present research provided partial support for this hypothesis as fear of missing out and need to belong demonstrated a significant indirect effect on conformity via social media usage, however, the mediating effect between peer pressure and conformity was non-significant. These findings suggest that while social media is a multifaceted platform, that connects billions of people worldwide and consistently satisfies users' needs, it often does so at the cost of individuality (Ku, Chu, & Tseng, 2013). To achieve gratification, users frequently conform to online norms, which can have significant implications for both physical and mental health (Dogan & Kaya, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation yield both practical and theoretical applications. From a theoretical standpoint, the study enhances the comprehension of the complex interplay between psychological determinants (including the need to belong, fear of missing out, and peer pressure) and social

media usage, showcasing how these factors contribute to conformity behaviours. This research expands upon Social Influence Theory by incorporating psychological motivations within the framework of digital contexts. From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that social media platforms significantly influence behaviour, and targeted interventions, such as digital literacy initiatives and awareness campaigns, may be effective in alleviating the adverse consequences of social media-induced conformity. These findings possess the potential to inform policy-making and strategic initiatives aimed at promoting healthier online behaviour and diminishing peer pressure, particularly among young adults.

Limitations and Suggestions

Some of the limitations of the current study are as follows. Firstly, the use of a cross-sectional survey approach to collect data restricts the ability to establish the causal relationship between the study variables. To better understand how these constructs are related to one another, experimental and long-term investigations are required. Secondly, subjective measures are used to collect data, future research could use objective measures to obtain in-depth information and purposive sampling was used which ensures relevance to the study objectives, but it limits generalizability as the sample may not fully represent all young adults in Pakistan. Thirdly, social media use is treated holistically in this study, but future research might concentrate on particular social networking platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc. Lastly, to obtain an accurate response the phenomena of conformity should be studied in the experimental setting because participants mostly fake it. Lastly, some participants' psychological distress can be caused by the reflection on social media behaviours or conformity-related issues. Additionally, they also feel pressured to answer in ways they perceive as socially acceptable, which may impact the authenticity of the responses. It is important to ensure that participants feel comfortable and offer resources for addressing any emotional discomfort that may arise during participation.

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