



Impact of Phubbing and FOMO on Cognitive Overload in Married Couples

Fareeha Asif¹, Atif Rasool², Saira Majid³, Ayesha Ishaq⁴, Emaan Zainab⁵

¹ Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: su92-mscpw-f23-047@superior.edu.pk

² Lecturer, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: atif.rasool@superior.edu.pk

³ Head of Department, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: sairamajid@superior.edu.pk

⁴ Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: Su92-mscpw-f23-003@superior.edu.pk

⁵ Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: Su92-mscpw-f24-031@superior.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative research examines the psychological and relational effects of phubbing—the act of neglecting one's partner in favor of mobile phone usage—and the fear of missing out (FOMO) on cognitive overload among married couples. It was hypothesized based on cognitive load theory and relational psychology and tested with correlation, multiple regressions. The sample was formed to include 200 married people with legal marriage partners who were between the ages of 21 and 55 years and lived with the spouse as well as being avoid smartphone users. The duration of marriage varied from 1 to 40 years. Participants who were undergoing divorce or separation, or who had been diagnosed with psychological or neurological disorders, were excluded to ensure the integrity of the sample. The findings indicated a strong positive correlation between FOMO and phubbing, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. Regression analysis confirmed that both FOMO and phubbing were significant predictors of cognitive overload, thus validating Hypothesis 2. These findings underscore the cognitive and emotional repercussions of digital behaviors within marital relationships, highlighting the necessity for mindful technology use in intimate environments. Limitations include dependence on self-reported data, a gender-imbalanced sample, and a cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference. Future studies should explore longitudinal methods and more diverse samples to enhance the understanding of digital disruptions in relational contexts.

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Corresponding Author's Email: su92-mscpw-f23-047@superior.edu.pk

1. Introduction

In the digital age, the expansion of smartphones and social media platforms has shifted the landscape of interpersonal communication, especially within intimate relationships. While these technologies offer unmatched ease and connectivity, they have also shown behavioral patterns that damaged the traditional ways of interaction. Two such phenomena—phubbing (phone snubbing) and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)—have combined as significant stress in psychological and emotional relations. These behaviors are increasingly spread in romantic

relationships, especially among married couples, where emotional and mutual presence are foundational to intimacy and relational satisfaction. The global relevance of these issues is underscored by the fact that over 5.4 billion people use the internet, with nearly 60% of the world's population present on social media platforms. Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2016) Phubbing refers to ignoring someone because of a mobile device during face-to-face interactions. This behavior, though often subtle or habitual, communicates a lack of presence and interest, leading to feelings of neglect and emotional factors. David and Roberts (2021) discovered that partner phubbing has a significant negative effect on relationship satisfaction and leads to heightened conflict. In a similar vein, Ergün, Göksu and Sakız (2020) associated phubbing with smartphone addiction and diminished self-control, indicating that those who partake in phubbing are frequently motivated by compulsive digital behaviors. In collectivist societies, particularly in South Asia, where interpersonal relationships and family ties are of utmost importance, the emotional repercussions of phubbing are especially severe. Cognitive overload, as defined within Cognitive Load Theory (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007), pertains to the burden placed on cognitive resources when the demands of a task exceed the individual's capacity to process information effectively. Emotional factors, including stress and anxiety caused by phubbing and FOMO, serve as an extraneous cognitive load, vying for limited cognitive resources (Tandon et al., 2021). This contends that emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, can alleviate cognitive load by reframing maladaptive emotional responses. However, when emotional regulation is compromised—often due to ongoing digital distractions, cognitive overload can become chronic, resulting in reduced emotional availability and relational fatigue. Emotional intimacy, which is defined as the ability of partners to share feelings, thoughts, and vulnerabilities, is an essential element of marital satisfaction (Kuiper et al., 2016) discovered that cognitive flexibility and emotion regulation are significant predictors of emotional intimacy. When cognitive overload hinders these abilities, couples find it challenging to sustain meaningful emotional exchanges. Phubbing, by redirecting attention away from the partner, disrupts the flow of emotional communication, while FOMO cultivates a sense of inadequacy and disconnection. These behaviors undermine the emotional foundation of the relationship, resulting in decreased satisfaction and heightened conflict.

Psychological methods such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based techniques have shown promise in alleviating phubbing and FOMO by enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation. The attitude of a person toward his or her own marital matters may be described as marital satisfaction). Marital satisfaction was explained as a view of greater or diminished suitability compared to the individual marital relationship (Oliveira, 2016). As identified by Kuiper et al. (2016) mobile phones use was found to interrupt the factors that are associated with marital satisfaction. People also need to know that they are cared about by their partner and that they can make them feel good in the future in any given situation. The constant flow of information can update users on what is happening with friends, but it also gives them anxiety at the same time. Numerous people appear to be closet spectators in the lives of others or those who are always one step back; correspondingly, at some point, they will develop disconnected anxiety. This results in a feeling among the users that they may have missed something valuable, and they may keep checking their mobile devices, leading to them developing a common social syndrome. As a result, fear of missing out (FoMO) as a product of information overflow in the mobile social media has attracted a good amount of non-professional attention. Research in the information behavior of mobile users who are the victims of FoMO is an emerging research topic including viewing, replying, and forwarding (Alutaybi et al., 2020). The widespread social media requires a profound effect to both the work and personal lives of individuals.

According to Kardos et al. (2018), the advanced information technology implementation has affected all aspects of the communication chain in information science, which includes the making, transmission, sharing, organizing, retrieving, and preserving information. Being a new information technology, social media follows this trend too. As an example, now it has become much easier to communicate with others, e.g. using Facebook or Twitter. This underscores the critical role of social presence and digital etiquette in alleviating the psychological repercussions of phubbing. Likewise, Servies (2012), revealed that FOMO related to mobile social media is a significant predictor of depressive symptoms, with phubbing serving as a mediating variable. These results are consistent across various cultural settings, suggesting a universal trend of digital behaviors that disrupt cognitive equilibrium (Majid et al., 2023). Purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of digital media on the relation of married couples. it seeks to identify

that digital distractions increase mental strain, decrease mental capacity, Attentional span and cause impaired communication among couples. To determine whether the combined effect of phubbing and FOMO effect cognitive overload and impair the marital satisfaction .to provide the insight for counselors, therapist and couples on how to manage digital behavior to improve the quality of relationships and mental wellbeing. Purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of digital media on the relation of married couples.it seeks to identify that digital distractions increase mental strain, decrease mental capacity, Attentional span and cause impaired communication among couples. To determine whether the combined effect of phubbing and FOMO effect cognitive overload and impaired marital satisfaction, to provide the insight for counselor, therapist and couples on how to manage the digital behavior to improve the quality of relationships and mental wellbeing.

1.1. Problem Statement

The growth and impact of the smartphone and social media have changed the ways in which interpersonal communication happens and specifically how intimate relationships like marriage can be sustained through emotional intimacy. Although such Technologies will give unprecedented possibilities to connect and share Information, they have also brought new behavioral patterns that primarily actively influence the dynamics of relationships, including the intention to overlook one of the partners as the superiority of mobile devices and the fear of missing out, anxiety associated with not experiencing rewarding experiences observed in others. Being discovered to have a potentially disruptive potential energy impact on marital satisfaction and emotional intimacy is an example of social exclusion that can negatively impact face to face interaction as the attention shifts away the person on the phone and on to the phone singing the song mistrust or indifference is something that is often taken as a negative aspect by the partner that is being neglected and this phenomenon is perceived as being disrespectful or rebuff to emotional responses that lead to a resentment felt in the heart to the partners lack of reciprocity and satisfaction in a loving relationship. At the same time, FOMO motivates people to use social media and online content whenever they feel compelled to say connected and not miss any significant social situations or newer this compulsive use makes people more mentally preoccupied and destructive when they are interacting with their partner together they may not be aware of being and fear of missing out can create high levels of cognitive overload as an individual cognitive capacities are stretched to near-breaking points because of too many stimuli to consider, having to multitask or come up with many new responses. The Dynamics is central to carrying forward the theoretical model of influence of digital media on intimate relationship as well as the development of practical intervention to challenge the presentation of emotional intimacy in the digital Era as use of smartphones continues to increase all over the world especially among married couples who are facing rising challenges in their ability to sustain the significant emotional relationship administrator or when the cognitive processing hence the study examine the interconnected nature of the influence of the social public as well as fear of missing out on cognitive overload on emotional intimacy in married couples.

1.2. Hypothesis

H1: FOMO and phubbing in married people are positively related.

H2: Cognitive overload among married people can be effectively determined by phubbing behavior and FOMO

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Theory of Media Dependency

Ball-Rokeach and DE Fleur (1976):

Individuals experience heightened reliance on media to fulfil its information-seeking and social validation needs as well as to help regulate mood in the face of instability or dynamic equilibrium; fear of missing out become more addicted to social media as a source of social connectedness and a means of identity validation in a marital relationship; this dependence results in increased conflicts whose involvement competes with partner interactions as these media use become addictive or emotionally charged.

2.2. Attachment Theory

Bowlby, 1969; Mikulins, 2007 & Shaver, 2007:

Attachment theory talks about the influence of early relational experience that forms Expectations and becomes discussed behavior in adult close relationships in secure attachment style anxious or appointment seem especially reactive. To feel that a partner ignored them or was unavailable because of could be a relational menace that triggered attachment to the securities anxiously attached individual Meri response to being with hyper Vigilance and the tight inspection of her companion Attention. frequently attached individual could emotionally distance themselves thinking the disconnection approved their anticipation of unavailability both reactions are intellectually and emotionally demanding contributing to the general workload on the person and enhancing the emotional connection with the partner.

2.3. Operational Definition

2.3.1. Phubbing (phone Snubbing)

The term phubbing refers to a pattern of behavior that maltreats the partner or partners with whom one is currently interacting in the flesh in order to concentrate on the smartphone. Phubbing shall be measured in this study through the Generic Scale of Phubbing (GSP) developed by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018) with higher scores suggesting an increased number and severity of cellphone-related distractions when consumed in an interpersonal context.

2.3.2. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO is a common fear that some people are experiencing gratification opportunities which one is not privy to. It includes the desire to be in constant contact with the life of other people. In the present study, the Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013) will be used to measure FOMO; the scale is a self-report measure involving 10 questions. The answers will be graded using a Likert scale, and higher scores will indicate higher level of FOMO.

2.3.3. Cognitive Overload

Cognitive overload refers to the mind condition where individuals field of thinking is not enough to process the quantity or complexity of information that is experienced. In the proposed research it will be measured through a self-report instrument based on NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) or another validated measure. Perceived mental demand, effort and frustration will be assessed and the composite scores will signify more cognitive overload.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The quantitative research design of correlational type was used in this study to investigate the relationships between phubbing and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in terms of two important outcomes: cognitive overload among Married couples. The sample of this research was comprised of married people in Punjab, Pakistan in the age range of 21 to 55 years. All the respondents had married at least one year and were residing with their spouse. The participants who met the inclusion criteria, a purposive sampling technique was applied. The choice of this non-probability method was made because of its strategic potential to locate the cases that are rich in information supporting the research questions and even some interventions that are to be offered to the participants of the research (Atlas's Research Hub, 2023).

3.2. Population

The sample of this research was comprised of married people in Punjab, Pakistan in the age range of 21 to 55 years. All the respondents had married at least one year and were residing with their spouse.

3.3. Sampling Technique

To sample the participants who met the inclusion criteria, a purposive sampling technique was applied. The choice of this non-probability method was made because of its strategic potential to locate the cases that are rich in information supporting the research questions and even some interventions that are to be offered to the participants of the research (Atlas's Research Hub, 2023). To sample the participants who met the inclusion criteria, a purposive sampling technique was applied. The choice of this non-probability method was made because of its strategic potential to locate the cases that are rich in information supporting the research questions and even some interventions that are to be offered to the participants of the research (ATLAS.ti Research Hub, 2023). As contrasted with a random sampling approach, which pursues the objectives of general representativeness, purposive sampling is an opportunity to select specific participants within the study deliberately due to certain qualities that align with the

research objectives (ATLAS.ti Research Hub, 2023). In this study, the criteria included marital status, cohabitation, age group, and minimum marriage length so that all respondents had pertinent life experiences with regard to the phenomena under study. As a result, the final sample (N = 200) included married people with efforts to create gender balance as far as possible. A wide range of educational levels such as teaching, healthcare, business and homemaking were selected as participants. This self-conscious differentiation was designed in order to heighten generalizability of results across several social-economic strata. The inclusion of participants in both the urban and semi-urban regions of Punjab led to the empirical capture of a wider range of relational experiences and digital habits, given that the province was experiencing a transformation in its socio-technological context. Purposive sampling was the appropriate method in this research since it enabled the identification of participants who were directly dealing with the issues of the digital engagement in their marriages. Since the study focuses on emotional intimacy and cognitive overload, which are extremely contextual and subjective, the random sampling may have resulted in the enrolment of people who do not have proper depth of relationships or experience of using a computer. Purposive sampling, in its turn, helped to provide a diversity of rich, contextualized information that a participant would be capable of providing and which would make the research internally valid and offering rich themes (Scribbr, 2023).

3.4. Inclusive and exculsion criteria

Living together as a married couple and the age between 21 to 55 years, Marriage Length 1 year 40 years and all participants have Access and frequent usage of smartphones. People with psychological or neurological disorders that have been diagnosed. Couples are in the process of divorce or separation now.

3.5. Analysis

Research results of the quantitative analysis conducted during the research to test the proposed model and assess the hypotheses regarding how phubbing and fear of missing out (FOMO) affect cognitive overload among married couples are described. Data analysis has been performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). Testing Hypothesis 1 (H1), Pearson correlation procedure was performed with the help of the Analyze > Correlate > Bivariate tool in SPSS. This performed a linear relationship analysis to determine the strength and direction of relationships between all the key variables and were situationally significant and helpful to understand all the relationships between the variables. Hypothesis 2 (H2) that postulated predictive relationships was tested using multiple linear regression analysis using the Analyze > Regression > Linear option. This method compared the effectiveness with which a set of independent variables might jointly predict a dependent variable and isolate the contributions of each predictor.

4. Results

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between phubbing and FOMO

Phub Score	FOMO Score		
Phub Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.767**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	200	200
FOMO Score	Pearson Correlation	.767**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson correlation analysis was done to explore the association between FOMO (FOMO Score) and phubbing behavior (Phub Score) in this age group. The results indicate that both variables are positively associated with a correlation coefficient $r = 0.767$, and it is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.001$). It means that the higher the FOMO levels, the more phubbing behavior is found amongst the participants. A sample size of 200 individuals was analyzed to give these results a good foundation. These findings can support the hypothesis that FOMO has a positive relationship with phubbing behavior in married individual.

Table 2: Regression for Phubbing, FOMO, and Cognitive overload in married couples

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.878	0.089		9.819	<.001
	Cegavske	0.334	0.031	0.604	10.633	<.001

p-value (< .001) validates that the model is statistically significant

The result significant ($p < .001$), coefficient taken by the use of multiple regression to check the combined and separate predictive roles of phubbing and FOMO on cognitive overload. This analysis has a sample size of 2 hundred participants, and this size is sufficient to give reliable regression modeling.

4.1. Good Correlation of FOMO and Phubbing

The fact that there was a significant and strong positive relationship between fear of missing out (FOMO) and phubbing behavior among married people ($r = .767$, $p < .001$) was established by the research. This indicates that people who experience more FOMO have a higher tendency of phubbing at the expense of their spouses in communication settings.

4.2. Phubbing and FOMO in Cognitive Overload Forecasting

Both phubbing and FOMO proved to be major predictors of cognitive overload. The multiple regression revealed these variables to have reached a significant degree of explanation of variance in cognitive overload ($F(2, 196) = 291.954$, $p < .001$) and hence proved the hypothesis: Digital behaviors are a source of mental fatigue in moral situations.

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) was that there is a positive relationship between FOMO and phubbing behavior in married people. This hypothesis was supported by the results as it showed there is sound and statistically significant correlation between the two variables as a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .767$ ($p < .001$) was indicated. It is in keeping with the results of the previous research and recommends that when people have a lot of FOMOS, they become more prone to phubbing (David & Roberts, 2021). FOMO by default forces people to be in constant touch with their smartphones, expect to receive something online, or to view some content. Particularly in the relationship of husband and wife, this compulsive needs to remain digitally connected is likely to be witnessed as a distraction to the face-to-face communication that leads to phubbing. The significant correlation also presupposes the psychological form, according to which individuals having FOMO put priority on being socially approved in their virtual life rather than being involved immediately in marriage with a spouse. Such a tendency can be viewed concerning romantic relations where the ready to show and listen to emotions is crucial to sustain intimacy and trust. The next hypothesis (H2) proposed that phubbing and FOMO would become great predictors of cognitive overload. The multiple regression test had great support on this hypothesis. Both phubbing ($r = .782$) and FOMO ($r = .837$) were found to be important predictors of cognitive overload. Moreover, the regression model explained a significant proportion of variance in the levels of cognitive overloads ($F(2, 196) = 291.954$, $p < .001$), thus allowing confirming the high predictive potential of these variables.

5.1. Implication

The existing study has a number of practical and theoretical implications. The theoretical sample, on the one hand, makes the identified relationships between fear of missing out (FOMO), phubbing behavior, cognitive overload, and emotional intimacy serve as an expansion of the available literature that bridges the issue of psychological well-being with digital media use within the context of intimate relationships. These outcomes do not only confirm theories previously developed like the cognitive load theory (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011) or attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), but they also expand them, which means that continuing online interactions condition human thinking and reduce their ability to be emotionally available to each other in love relationships. Phubbing as a manifestation of digital non-participation and FOMO as an anxiety-fuelled motive power could undermine intimacy by inhibiting attention and reducing the possibility of deeper interactions between people. At practical level, these results have significant implications on couples, therapists, and relationship educators. Interventions involving digital

mindfulness may be valuable to couples and include the establishment of technology-free areas in a home or predetermined moments of the day that encourage a face-to-face interaction. Therapists should possibly examine online behaviors, screen utilization, and panic of missing out on the clinical intake form, particularly when clients report being angry with their relationships or communication developments. Furthermore, in comparative terms, digital wellness may be presented in relationship education programs to raise awareness about the cognitive and emotional effects of overusing smartphones. In addition, the findings suggest that addressing the issue of digital overuse affects not just the changes in behavior; it requires the management of mental resources and the development of emotional presence.

5.2. Research Gaps

The results of the present study introduce a number of possible avenues of future investigations. The results of the study were based on individual reports and did not encompass dyadic information put together by both partners. The inclusion of these two voices (that of the partners) would also offer a more elaborate and deeper picture or comprehension of how phubbing and emotional intimacy are viewed and felt about in the relationship.

Secondly, prospective studies must utilize more longitudinal design to prove the impact of phubbing and FOMO on marital well-being and satisfaction in the long run. These designs could explain whether the impacts of such behaviors are cumulative or alternatively do not vary with life changes (e.g., parenthood, career changes).

Thirdly, experimental investigations of the manipulation of digital behavior (e.g., try phone-free evenings) would provide causal information about the topic and implement effective intervention plans. Lastly future studies will focus on increasing the sample size in terms of age, culture and sexual orientation to increase the generalizability of the research findings and to determine how technology influences a broader range of relationship types.

5.3. Future Research

Types of Longitudinal Designs Longitudinal designs serve a causal clarity purpose; however, they may be classified into long- or short-term designs. This research was done in a cross-sectional manner which restricts any causal interpretation. Proposed future research should be designed as Longitudinal in order to study the development of emotional intimacy and cognitive overload over a period particularly with the changes in smartphone habits.

The efficacy of behavioral changes cannot be tested by using observational data. Intervention and Experimental Methods Use experimental research or intervention research in determining whether educating phubbing that lowers emotional intimacy or controlling FOMO is beneficial.

The present sample can never be generalized to all cultures, socioeconomic statuses, or sexual orientations. To be able to generalize the results, future studies should cover the various populations as Intercultural couples (e.g. collectivist vs. individualist cultures), Gay couples, Differing socio-economic classes

6. Conclusion

This study examined the complicated association among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), phubbing conduct, cognitive overload, and emotional trust as regards married pairs. These results are in line with the earlier studies, including those suggesting that phubbing and depressive symptoms may serve as predictors of FOMO; additionally, phubbing behavior disturbs emotional regulation and relationship satisfaction. The findings are further supported by the demographic facts of the sample which include mostly people in the early to middle adulthood stage, whose average marriage lasts over ten years and whose screen time is also high. The target audience is a group of people that have become firmly devoted to long-term relationships and ubiquitous digital spaces. Of special importance is the high screen time, which reflects the increased adoption of technology into the daily routine and the manner of communication as well as the emotional engagement. Clinically speaking, these results emphasize the urgent need of digital mindfulness and mindfulness of presence in romantic relationships. Phubbing as a light social mistake should serve as an interpersonal snub with the message of being not interested and not being available. Repetitive phubbing can lead to a sense

of rejection, loneliness, and a lower sense of self-worth, which are also typical of couples therapy sessions. On the other hand, FOMO is an effect of a psychological need to belong to the group and feel valued, which is frequently aggravated through the use of social media where we may be exposed to perfect versions of the appearance of other people lives. Overall, the analysis highlights the association, which is intricate and clinically pertinent, amid FOMO, phubbing, cognitive overload, and emotional intercourse. The adoption of such behavior that is typical of the digital age does not constitute a mere western lifestyle but is part and parcel of psychological processes that determine the health of relationships. All these problems require a complex, interdisciplinary approach that will combine both psychological theory and a therapeutic practice with ethics in digital contexts. With the constant development of technology, we will also have to change our understanding of its impact on emotional relationships, cognitive well-being, and the nature of intimate relationships.

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