

Digital Hoarding, Fear of Missing Out and Attachment Anxiety among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Study aimed to establish relationships among digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults. To determine digital hoarding and fear of missing out as a predictor of attachment anxiety among young adults and to explore the gender differences between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

Methodology: Using a cross-sectional correlational research design, data was collected from 210 University students through self-report questionnaires. Key measures included Digital Hoarding Questionnaire (Neave et al., 2019), Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013) and Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1996).

Findings: Correlational Analysis revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety. Age had no correlation while digital device storage used had significant correlation with all the study variables. In Hierarchical Regression, both digital hoarding and fear of missing out positively predicted attachment anxiety while gender did not predict attachment anxiety. Interestingly, the number of siblings when entered with digital hoarding and fear of missing out, negatively predicted attachment anxiety. Additionally, t-tests were run and there were no gender differences among digital hoarding and attachment anxiety while women had higher level of fear of missing out as compared to men.

Conclusion: This research in the Pakistani Context shows that how the rising psychological consequences of online behaviors such as hoarding and FOMO connect with relational insecurities such as attachment anxiety. In these dynamics, these findings analyze the interplay between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety which enables the identification of how maladaptive digital behaviors develop and linger.

Keywords: Digital Hoarding, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Attachment Anxiety.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increased access to technology results in an escalating phenomenon known as digital hoarding; that is, individuals collect and stockpile excessive digital files including videos, pictures, emails, and so forth which is beyond what might be considered reasonable or even manageable (Bawden & Robinson, 2012). One such mental condition, identified as the spreading fear of missing out, or FOMO, an individual perpetually anxious about missing some critical information or an important social occasion, is connected with digital hoarding (Przybylski et al., 2013). These problems make young adults cumbersome by attachment anxiety, which is characterized by an inflated need for validation and by fear of rejection in relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The new suggestions thus now posit that anxious attachment individuals would most easily get entangled with activities such as digital hoarding and excessive socializing to attempt to regulate feelings of insecurity and restore control (Hart et al., 2018).

At present, the growth of information and communication technology has made digital hoarding widespread (Kumari & Kumar, 2023; Shankar et al., 2022; Tugtekin, 2022). The digital accumulation of so many files that one does not know where to draw the line, which causes mess and further makes the person more stressed, is termed as digital hoarding (Neave et al., 2019). Digital hoarding trends have been identified to be strongly prevalent among the younger generation, particularly because of a child's reliance on digital technology as well as social networking. Research studies have indeed proved that young adults become more hooked to digital hoarding tendencies due to their massive intake of digital content in the form of images, videos, and documents. The group is reported to often fail to eradicate digital files due to fear of losing vital information or memories that may generate clutter in their digital stores (Neave et al., 2019; Sweeten et al., 2018; Safdar and Waseem, 2025; Syed et al., 2023; Hassan and Safdar, 2022).

Social media addiction causes consumers to worry about sharing and missing information as shares increase. This situation leads to the development of FOMO among users of the post 1990s age (Wang et al., 2021). Erciş et al. (2021) defined fear of missing out on some great experiences that another person might have. Przybylski et al. (2013) also connected fear of missing out to the absence of some psychological needs. They determined in their research that individuals who recorded lower on the attainment of the three elementary psychological needs: self-sufficient, that is, meaningful choice; relatedness, or connection to other people; and competence, or efficacy, reported not only higher levels of FOMO but also a greater amount of behavior associated with social media. Beyens et al. (2016) reported that adolescents and young adults with higher levels of FOMO were more likely to perceive themselves as being isolated from others and less than satisfied with their lives, in which their lives are constantly compared against what other people's lives seemed to be on social media—mostly presented as projected and idealized. Such exposure increases the feeling of inadequacy, making young adulthood a very important age group to be researched into the effects of FOMO.

Attachment in adult lifespan is conceptualized along the two aspects of anxiety and avoidance. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), attachment anxiety is associated with a poor mental representation of the self, higher sensitivity to rejection, and constant search for affection on other people's part. The basis for attachment theory was laid by Bowlby's (1980) and subsequent work, linking the anxious attachment pattern with problems in emotion regulation and consequences that affect mental health. It is suggested by Arnett (2000) that young adulthood is a very critical developmental stage for which dramatic changes in identity formation and social connections are generally found. People frequently experience problems associated with attachment issues during this period, which may give birth to the issue of attachment anxiety. Studies indicate that people with escalated extent of attachment anxiety may also find it challenging to maintain stable relationships, and they usually experience higher emotional discomfort (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To establish relationships among digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

- To determine digital hoarding and fear of missing out as a predictor of attachment anxiety among young adults.
- To explore the gender differences between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

H¹. There is likely to be a relationship among digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

H². Digital hoarding and fear of missing out are likely to predict attachment anxiety among young adults.

H³. There are likely to be gender differences among digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2024) examined the ways in which several factors, such as information overload, emotional attachment, decision fatigue, and FOMO, could potentially affect digital hoarding behaviors among Iranian undergraduate students. This research established that digital hoarding behavior is significantly explained by university students' emotional attachment, information overload, decision fatigue, and fear of missing out. Perazzini et al. (2023) examined the relationships between FOMO and attachment styles in adulthood (close, dependent, and anxious) and the potential moderating effect of mindfulness. As per the research, there is a close relationship between fear of missing out (FOMO) and the three attachment types—close, dependent, and anxious—via the indirect effect of vigilant attitudes.

Alfasi (2020) was concerned with examining the association among fear of missing out (FOMO), insecure attachment (avoidant and anxious) and intolerance of ambiguity. In the interaction between high attachment anxiety and FOMO levels, the findings revealed that intolerance of uncertainty played a mediating role. These findings suggest that nervously linked individuals can be even more vulnerable to FOMO since they do not perform well in situations involving uncertainty. The underlying mechanisms of digital hoarding were explored by Zhao et al. (2023), as well as how social media affordances and FOMO influence the phenomenon. The results indicated that digital hoarding behaviour is significantly positively influenced by FOMO, and that social media affordance mediates the relationship between digital hoarding behaviour and FOMO. The study also revealed that information anxiety and attachment anxiety can potentially predict the FOMO significantly.

Bousted and Flack (2021) investigated how anxious attachment, fear of missing out and life satisfaction, simultaneously affected problematic social networking use. The results of the study indicated that anxious attachment was related positively to problematic social networking use (PSNU). Further results stated that fear of missing out mediated the relationship between problematic social networking use (PSNU) and anxious attachment. Khan et al. (2023) examined how digital hoarding affects the mental health problems among undergraduate students. The results indicated that digital hoarding has a strong relationship with mental health problems among undergraduate students as digital hoarding was positively associated with depression, also, stress, anxiety and depression were strongly predicted by digital hoarding.

The literature about indigenous works, in considering the digital hoarding-FOMO-attachment anxiety link, has hardly been investigated. Contemporary studies discuss these variables mostly as separate topics in the wider, independent contexts where one talks about the psychological implications of FOMO (Younas et al., 2022) and attachment anxiety (Irfan et al., 2023) or about the behavioral impacts of digital usage (Khan et al., 2023) respectively. Such research can offer relevant insights for every single variable, but their integration remains lacking in respect to how these effects function together.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) explains the possible consequence of attachment issues early in life—that is, developing attachment anxiety: a characteristic by which one fears abandonment and needs constant reassurance. Applying this to the digital age, it may be an individual's basis for digital hoarding and FOMO as behavior applicable to handling attachment anxiety.

Digital Hoarding and FOMO can also actively contribute to the creation of attachment anxiety when placed in the light of Attachment Theory, which implies that individuals having insecure attachment styles, such as anxious attachment, are constantly seeking assurance within their relationship. Digital hoarding is often motivated by the need to exert some form of control over one's environment due to the threat of losing valuable information or social connections, according to Sedera et al. (2022). The more they hoard digital items, if this includes messages or social media content, the more they have obligations to maintain their emotional security developed, which deepens attachment anxiety in that they are increasingly beholden to the digital world to help them keep social relationships.

This theoretical framework suggests that FOMO and digital hoarding are related in that they create a cyclical feedback loop. Compulsion to maintain connectedness and accumulate digital content aggravates attachment anxiety, as the individual increases the sensitivity to social rejection and disconnection to meaningful relationships.

3. METHODS AND MATERIAL

3.1 Research design

Cross-sectional correlational research design was employed for this investigation. Digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety were studied among young adults. The study's variables were looked at without being controlled.

3.2 Instruments

Digital Hoarding Questionnaire. The Digital Hoarding Scale (Neave et al., 2019) measures the two behaviors involved in digital hoarding which are accumulating and difficulty deleting. It consists of 10 items. Every item is scored using a 7-point Likert Scale where 1 is marked as not at all and 7 as very much so.

Fear of Missing Out Scale. Fear of Missing Out Scale measures the intense worry about what others are doing and missing a rewarding event (Przybylski et al., 2013). This scale consists of 10 items and none of the items are reverse coded. Every item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is not at all true to me and 5 is extremely true to me.

Revised Adult Attachment Questionnaire. The Revised Adult Attachment Questionnaire by Collins and Read (1996) measures the two dimensions of attachment which are attachment anxiety (model of self) and attachment avoidance (model of other). The scale consists of 18 items. Every item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is not at all characteristic to me and 5 being very characteristic to me. The analyses and assessments were done on the sub-scale of attachment anxiety as it is the main area of interest rather than computing the entire scale.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study were 210 young adults with an age range of 18 to 25 years (World Health Organization). The sample was collected from two government universities as required. Young adults with at least one personal digital device were included in the research. The participants who use social media at least one hour daily were included in the research. Participants enrolled in the last two semesters of any undergraduate program were included in the research.

4. RESULTS

Various analyses were used to analyze the data using statistical software, IBM SPSS Statistics version 30.0.0. The statistical analyses used in the research included descriptive statistics of demographics, reliability analysis of the study variables. Person Correlation analysis was run to examine the relationship between age and study variables. Also, an independent sample t-test was run to explore gender differences across the study variables. Hierarchical Multiple Regression was conducted to examine how and whether digital hoarding and fear of missing out predict attachment anxiety after controlling demographic variables.

The demographic information sheet consisted of personal, family and social information of the participant including age, gender, number of siblings, birth order, living conditions, education type, socio-economic status, relationship status, current status, income, social media usage, number of digital devices owned, and storage of the digital devices used.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Demographic Variables of Young Adults (N=210)

Demographic Characteristics	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>f</i>	%
Age of the participants	21.94	1.13	210	100
Gender				
Male			70	34
Female			140	66
Number of Siblings				
Family Type				
Nuclear			135	64.3
Joint			75	35.7
Birth Order				
First Born			62	29.5
Middle Born			86	41
Last Born			54	25.7
Only Child			8	3.8
Socio-economic status				
Upper class			15	7.1
Middle class			193	91.9
Lower class			2	1
Social media usage (daily hours)	1.84	.726		
1 hour			73	34.8
2 hours			95	45.2
3 hours or more			42	20
No. of digital devices owned				
1			48	22.9
2			134	63.8
3 or more			28	13.3
Storage of the device/s used (GBs)	110.61	77.98		

Note: *M*=Mean; *SD*=Standard Deviation; *f*=frequency; %=Percentage

The psychometric properties of Digital Hoarding Questionnaire (DHQ), Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOS) and Attachment Anxiety Subscale (AAS) among the sample of 210 young adults were assessed. The range, mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha reliability (α) was calculated for each scale. The scales of Digital Hoarding, Fear of Missing Out and Attachment Anxiety sub-scale showed good values of reliability ranging from .83 to .91. These findings show that these measures have good internal consistency and are reliable measures for measuring digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults.

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of the Digital Hoarding Questionnaire, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Attachment Anxiety Sub-Scale (N=210)

Scales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Cronbach's α
DHQ	50.28	11.81	19-70	.913
FOMOS	35.84	8.34	11-48	.880
AAttS	66.33	10.67	40-82	.819
AAS	21.80	5.17	7-30	.830

Note. (N=210). DHQ= Digital Hoarding Questionnaire; FOMOS= Fear of Missing Out Scale; AAttS=Adult Attachment Scale; AAS= Attachment Anxiety Sub- Scale.

4.1 Correlational Analysis

Pearson product moment correlation was run to find relationship between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety. Demographic variables including age and digital device storage were also added to assess their nature of relationship with study variables. The results indicated that age had no significant correlation with any of the study variables. On the other hand, Digital device storage used had significant positive correlation with digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety. Also, there was a considerable highly significant relationship among all study variables. Overall, the strongest correlation was between fear of missing out and Attachment Anxiety.

Table 3: Pearson correlation among Age, Digital Devices Owned, Digital Hoarding, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Attachment Anxiety among Young Adults (N=210).

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age of Participant	21.91	1.12	—				
2. Device Storage Used	108.78	76.89	-.01	—			
3. Digital Hoarding	50.28	11.81	-.004	.29***	—		
4. Fear of Missing Out	35.84	8.34	-.02	.22**	.645***	—	
5. Attachment Anxiety	21.80	5.17	-.03	.22**	.647***	.650***	—

Note. (N=210) * $p < .05$ level; ** $p < .01$ level; *** $p < 0.001$ level.

4.2 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was carried out to see whether demographics, digital hoarding and FOMO predict attachment anxiety. In Model 1, gender and siblings were entered, and the overall model was not significant($p=.112$), showing that these demographic factors did not explain variance in attachment anxiety significantly. In Model 2, digital hoarding and FOMO were included. The model was significant($p<.001$) and accounted for a large increase in variance in attachment anxiety. In this final model, both FOMO($\beta=.396$, $p<.001$) and digital hoarding ($\beta=.394$, $p<.001$) were significant positive predictors of attachment anxiety. Notably, number of siblings was also a significant negative predictor in the final model ($\beta=-.114$, $p<.019$) such that individuals with higher numbers of siblings reported lower attachment anxiety. Gender was not a good predictor in either of the models. Overall, model 1 explain 2.1% variance in attachment anxiety while model 2 explains 52.5% variance in attachment anxiety.

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Results for

Variable	<i>B</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>				
Step 1						.02	.02
Constant	3.59***	3.08	4.09	.26			
Gender ^a	.16	-.09	.40	.13	.09		
No. of siblings	-.06	-.14	.01	.04	-.11		

Step 2						.53	.50***
Constant	1.02***	.52	1.51	.25			
Gender ^a	-.06	-.23	.12	.09	-.032		
No. of siblings	-.06*	-.11	-.01	.03	-.11*		
TDHQ	.29***	.20	.38	.05	.397***		
TFOMOS	.409***	.280	.539	.066	.396***		

Attachment Anxiety (N=210)

Note. (N=210), CI=Confidence Interval, UL=Upper Limit, LL=Lower Limit, Gender ^a(1=Men, 2=Women), *p < .05 level; **p < .01level; ***p < 0.001 level). NOS=Number of Siblings, TDHQ= Total Digital Hoarding Questionnaire, TFOMOS= Total Fear of Missing Out Scale. In model 1= we analysed gender and number of siblings on attachment anxiety. In model 2, we added digital hoarding and fear of missing out.

4.3 Group Differences across Study Variables

To find about the mean differences in gender with accordance to digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety, an independent sample t-test was run. Results show that digital hoarding and attachment anxiety have no significant mean differences. Whereas there is a significant mean difference in fear of missing out. This significant mean difference shows that women have higher level of fear of missing out (FOMO) as compared to men.

Table 5: Gender differences among study variables (N=210)

Variable	Men		Women		t(208)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
TDHQ	4.81	1.18	5.13	1.17	-.19	.06	.27
TFOMOS	3.39	.89	3.68	.80	-2.43*	.02	.35
TAAS	3.52	.860	3.69	.861	-1.31	.12	.20

Note *p < .05, **p < .01; (N=210). DHQ= Total Digital Hoarding Questionnaire, TFOMOS= Total Fear of Missing Out Scale, TAAS=Total Attachment Anxiety Subscale

5. DISCUSSION

The current research aimed to explore the association between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults. Reliability analyses revealed that all study variables are functionally reliable with Digital Hoarding Questionnaire having the highest internal consistency. The outcome of the correlation analysis disclosed that there was a highly significant correlation between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety. These findings are in line with the previous researches (Zaremozhzabieh et al., 2024; Tugtekin, 2020; Alfasi, 2020). Among demographics, age had no correlation with study variables which was in opposition with the previous findings (Rozgonjuk et al., 2021) while digital device storage had significant correlation with the study variables.

The hierarchical regression analysis revealed that both digital hoarding and FOMO are positive predictors of attachment anxiety. This suggests that individuals having higher levels of digital hoarding and fear of missing out are more likely to exhibit higher levels of attachment anxiety. Among the demographics, Gender and number of siblings were included in the prediction analysis which revealed that both gender and number of siblings were not significant predictors of attachment anxiety but when entered along with digital hoarding and fear of missing out, number of siblings emerged as a significant negative predictor meaning that the more siblings an individual has, the lesser the attachment anxiety which is backed by previous researches (Sinchana & Thomas, 2024).

An independent sample t-test was run to assess these differences. The results revealed that there are no significant gender differences in digital hoarding behavior among young adults and was supported by existing literature (Tugtekin, 2020). Also, there were no significant gender differences in attachment anxiety which is in opposition to the previous study of Weber et al. (2022) who reported that women will

likely have higher attachment anxiety as compared to men. This contradiction can be due to the cultural differences and can be the grounds of further research. Interestingly, there were significant gender differences in fear of missing out (FOMO) with women having higher levels of fear of missing out (FOMO) as compared to men. This finding is not consistent with the previous literature which reported that there are no gender differences in fear of missing out (Rozgonjuk et al., 2021).

5.1 Limitations and Suggestions

- The research was based on self-report measures, which could be influenced by social desirability bias. So, in future, using interviews or open-ended questions may reveal more about personal experiences regarding the study variables.
- The sample was restricted to young adults and might not characterize other ages. These variables should be further investigated in diverse populations, such as different ages, relationship statuses, and cultures.
- Participants might have lost motivation when completing long questionnaires. It is advised for future researchers to use brief and more interactive measures to enhance attention and quality of response.
- As a cross-sectional correlational study, it will not establish cause-and-effect.
- Future studies may employ longitudinal designs to investigate causal relationships and follow changes in digital hoarding, FOMO, and anxiety of attachment over time.

5.2 Implications

- The research emphasizes the rising psychological consequences of online behaviors such as hoarding and FOMO, and how they connect with relational insecurities such as attachment anxiety.
- Digital hoarding and FOMO may be considered by mental health professionals as potential signs or causes of relational anxiety during therapy, particularly when dealing with digitally engaged populations.
- Universities, colleges, and counseling agencies can use these results to create awareness programs on the psychological impacts of excessive digital interaction.
- App developers and social networking sites can take these findings into consideration to minimize addictive behaviors and encourage healthier internet usage.

6. CONCLUSION

The outcomes of the research revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between digital hoarding, fear of missing out and attachment anxiety among young adults. Also, age was not correlated with any of the study variables whereas the number of digital device storage used was significantly correlated with all the three study variables. Both digital hoarding and fear of missing out positively predict attachment anxiety among young adults. Among demographics, gender did not predict attachment anxiety and number of siblings when entered simultaneously with digital hoarding and fear of missing out negatively predicted attachment anxiety. As far as gender differences are concerned, there were no significant gender differences among digital hoarding and attachment anxiety while in fear of missing out, women reported higher levels of fear of missing out as compared to men. As one relates these facts with the research sample of youth, there is a significant drive towards using online platforms and overall mental soundness due to FOMO. After the fear of missing out on rewarding experiences grips them, these individuals, needing validation and a sense of social relationship, get stuck in the vicious cycle of compulsive usage of digital world. This research studies the relationship between these variables and provides a case to control FOMO in interventions for digital well-being of young adults.

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Conflict of Interest

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