

# Impact of Loneliness and Fear of Missing Out on Phubbing Behavior among Millennials

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## ABSTRACT

The internet and smartphones have aimed to be a way to socialize and keep one amused, and the younger generations have been enslaved to these advances by their fascination with social networking sites (SNS). Despite the fact that stated purpose of technology like smartphones is to help people connect with each other's, in this specific instance, it does the opposite of it. Ironically, the technology that was envisaged to bring humans closer together has isolated them from these very same people. As a result, the current research looked into the role of isolation, fear of missing out, and phubbing among millennials. Cross-sectional research design was used to conduct this study and survey method was used to collect data from participants who were 400 Millennials (170 males and 230 females) taken from the city of Multan, Pakistan. Convenient sampling technique was used for data collection. UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) The variables were measured using the Loneliness Scale Version 3, the Fear of Missing Scale, and the Phubbing Scale. The results of this study suggested that the relationship between loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing behavior among millennials was significantly positive. Regression analysis was done to explore the impact of loneliness and Fear of missing out on phubbing behavior. However, the results further indicated that fear of missing out has a larger influence on phubbing than loneliness. Further finding of the current study was concerned with loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing towards gender through t-test. The results found that females have high level of loneliness as compared to males; hence, phubbing behavior is higher in females than males. The findings also showed that fear of missing out do not vary in terms of gender. So, phubbing behavior equally affects male and female. In short, it is concluded that phubbing is a nuance concept and not widely researched in Pakistan. Finally, the observations of current study helped in identification and eradication of this behavior and added to the existing research literature

## Keywords

loneliness, fear of missing out, phubbing, millennials

## Introduction

The term phubbing refers is a combination of the two words 'phone' and 'snubbing' originated in Australia (Robert & David, 2016). Phubbing corresponds to the idea of ignoring someone in a societal setting, when people prefer to look at the phone rather than paying attention or talking to the person, who is in their company (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Phubbing is a word coined by a variety of lexicographers, writers, and creators were asked to create a neologism for their actions at a conference organized by advertising agency McCann Melbourne, 2013 at Sydney University to explain the trend of ignoring people around you in favor of paying attention to your screen (Khare & Qasim, 2019).

Phubbing appears to have negative implications for communication with partners, detrimental to relationship as the partners start having dissatisfaction and the also feel that their personal wellbeing is also being neglected (Afdal et al. 2019). Phubbing behavior, phubbers and phubbees are very common part of our contemporary society. A person attempting to phubb their companion in a social interaction can be regarded as a Phubber', and a "phubbee" is a person who is on the receiving end of phubbing behavior (Abeele et al. 2019). Loneliness and fear of missing out are two possible factors that increase the phubbing behavior (Karadag et al. 2015). Phubbing is a persistent use of the Smart phone which allows the other person to be affected by

a lack of human contact or by using the smart phone excessively. The phenomenon of phubbing emerges from the unchecked consequences of modernization. Modern society enjoys doing different activities by using a variety of innovations to make them individualistic and does not care for social conditions that arise because of these technological advances (Afdal et al. 2019).

Loneliness is defined as the extent to which a person lives alone and has little or no interpersonal relationships with others (Karapetsas et al. 2015). Loneliness is a distressful, subjective feeling, arising when one perceives their social relationships to be dissatisfying and insufficient. Unlike the past, where the old people were associated with loneliness, now the Millennials are the ones who are also surrounded by the fear or loneliness and it encourages them to find ways to fight this loneliness through their smartphones (Matthews et al. 2016). The fact that most of the people in the world today are surrounded by Smartphones is well known. Smartphones are used as a method to resolve isolation but excessive use of Smartphone also affects the quality of interactions among individual (Stead & Bibby, 2017). Phubbing can bring about in an individual, a sense of isolation from the reality and simultaneously brings them into a virtual world. Phubbing may further damage an individual's psychological health when they cannot seem to cope with this phenomenon particularly well (Çikrikci, Griffiths, & Erzen, 2019).

FOMO (fear of missing out) is described as a persistent fear that others are having satisfying experiences that we are

missing out on. Simply put, it means fear that the subject might be missing some important and enjoyable experiences that others are participating and enjoying (Abel, Buff, & Burr, 2016). When individuals experience Fear of missing out then they check their smartphones regularly to keep updated of all the incoming information to decrease the likelihood of being ostracized and becoming lonely. They're also compelled to overuse social networking sites to fulfill their need to belong. Fear of missing out has also been shown to have negative impact on overall life satisfaction (Beyens, Frison & Eggermont, 2016). A Survey completed by 500 participants beyond 8 countries show that one in four participants check their phones every 30 minutes, and one in every five participants checked their mobile phone every 10 minutes. The motivation for this behavior was predominantly the fear of missing something superior than what they are recently doing (Gibbs, 2012). This habitual need for keeping connected can result checking their smartphones even in condition which are not safe, such as driving (Turkle, 2008).

Phubbing behavior is very much common in Millennials, labelled as the "Wired Generation" (Irimiás et al. 2021). Two aspects peculiar to the millennium generation relate to mobile technology and social networking. Millennials are identified as the first "high technology generation" (Eastman et al. 2014). Generations born between 1981 and 2000 are generally defined as millennials (Weber & Urick, 2017). A generation is a group recognizable through its birth year, age, location and significant events (Guha, 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002).). Millennial generations have different values, attitudes and behavior as compared with previous generations. They are digital indigenous people, enthusiastic about technological progress. Indeed, the key role of technology is to differentiate between them and previous generations (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Important events like conflicts, new technologies or major economic changes can be transformed into a generation such activities form this generation's personality, beliefs and aspirations (Williams et al. 2012). This population was thus considered for this research as it has gone through a transformation of technology. They have witnessed the advancements in the use and applications of mobile phone. The relationship of the study variables was explained using Mobile Dependency Theory. It describes how people become reliant on the media to meet their needs. (Ball Rokeach, 1998).

Karadag et al. (2016) conducted a research on some college students, the results of the study indicated that they use smartphones more often whenever they felt lonely, as they felt that using smartphones would help them ease their feeling of loneliness. Thus, it can be said that the fear of loneliness encourages the use of smart phones, which can also develop into the habit of Phubbing. This study concludes that addiction to smartphones is the strongest predictor that indicates a tendency towards phubbing behavior. Hence, smartphone addicts are more likely to phub. Xu (2017) studied how 195 high school students in Beijing respond to smartphone addiction, social anxiety and loneliness. The results of the study found that students who are smartphone dependent, facing a higher degree of loneliness. Loneliness is a major reason to rely on smartphone usage for high school students. Students prefer

to make new friends or to enter other virtual groups by means of smart phone media, so that they can get rid of their isolation, but it's difficult for them to turn virtual connections into close connections.

Social networking sites now constitute an important part of people's lives, particularly young adults. According to the 2018 study, approximately 70% of adults in the US have Facebook, and 75% indicated that they use Facebook every day. The study showed that Snapchat was used by 78% of young adults (18–24) and Instagram by 71%. The increased use of social networks prompted researchers to carry out correlation studies in order to find the connection between FOMO and the problem use of these sites. (Hunt et al. 2018).

Ang, Chong, and Lau (2019) investigated the link between loneliness, fear of missing out, and phubbing activity among Malaysian undergraduates. Using convenient sampling, the sample size was determined. This study included 172 undergraduates, ranging in age from 17 to 26 years old. The study enlisted the participation of 59 men and 113 women. Pearson Correlation was used in this study. It was discovered that loneliness and phubbing have a major positive relationship. It was also discovered that there is a strong link between fear of losing out and phubbing activity. Overall, the findings revealed that loneliness and the fear of missing out, both of which are important components of the media dependency theory, are strongly linked to the likelihood of phubbing behavior.

## Materials And Methods

### Research Design and Participants

This research has used the quantitative research technique and cross-sectional design was used to conduct the survey for the data collection. The data was collected from the 400 millennials (N=400) comprising of males (170) and females (230) taken from the city of Multan by convenient sampling technique through self-administered survey using standardized instruments.

### Procedures

The present study aimed to collect data about loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing behavior among millennial. The questionnaires were given to the participants (170 males and 230 females) consisted of consent form along with the mention of the demographical variable of age. After all the ethical considerations, the questionnaire consisting of the items of variables; loneliness, fear of missing out (FOMO), and phubbing behavior were given to the participants. UCLA loneliness scale was used to measure the level of loneliness and social isolation, fear of missing out scale by Przybylski et al. (2013) was used to measure the fear of missing, and phubbing scale Karadag et al. (2015) was used to measure the phubbing behavior. The respondents were asked to fill all the items of scales according to the instructions given in the questionnaire. The survey forms were then recollected for analysis purpose.

### Instruments

### 1. UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale Version 3:

Psychologist Daniel Russel (1996) has developed this scale. UCLA was initially published in 1978 and revised in 1980 and 1996, the University of California, Los Angeles. Version 3 of the Loneliness Scale is revised from the original UCLA “Loneliness Scaling” and the revised UCLA “Scale of Loneliness”. The scale level consists of 20 Likert items and 4-point measurements to determine a level of loneliness and social isolation. The questions 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19 and 20 are given in nine reverse scores and the 20 items have been added to the total score. The score indicates the greater degree of loneliness and this scale consists of high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = .96), which is very good sign that all the questions were reliable (Russell, 1996).

### 2. Fear of Missing out Scale:

Przybylski et al. (2013) has created this scale. FOMO (fear of missing out) is a metric for assessing the fear of social media exclusion. It is made up of ten items and a five-point scale to assess the fear of missing out. A total of ten points are added together, with the higher score indicating a greater fear of missing out. The reliability of this scale is  $\alpha = .87$  to  $.90$  (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell, 2013).

### 3. Phubbing Scale:

Karadag et al. (2015) developed this scale and this scale is used to measure the behavior of phubbing. This scale comprises ten items and it measures the phubbing behavior in a 5-point Likert scale. 10 items were added to the total score and higher the phubbing behavior testifies to. The reliability value of this scale is  $\alpha = .87$  for 5 items of communicative disorders and  $\alpha = .85$  for another five items of Obsession (Karadağ et al., 2015).

## Results, Findings And Discussion

The data obtained for the current research were analyzed through SPSS (22.0). Correlation coefficient analysis was used to find out Loneliness, fear of missing out, and phubbing behavior are all related. Loneliness and the fear of missing out on phubbing were also measured using regression analysis. However, T-test was used to measure the differences of scores of male and female and phubbing behaviors on loneliness and fear of missing out scales.

**Table 1:** Correlation of loneliness, Fear of missing out and Phubbing

Scales	Loneliness	FOMO	Phubbing
Loneliness	1	.20**	.130*
Fear of missing out		1	.65**
Phubbing			1

Note: N=400, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 1 above illustrated that there is a significant positive correlation between loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing among millennials.

**Table 2:** Regression Analysis showing Impact of Loneliness on Phubbing

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P
(Constant)	19.849	2.029		9.782	.000***
Loneliness	.103	.045	.115	2.303	.022*

Note:  $R^2 = .013$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .011$ , ( $F = 5.303$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ \*)

Table 2 above shows the significant impact of loneliness on phubbing behavior among millennials.

**Table 3:** Regression Analysis showing impact of Fear of Missing out on Phubbing

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	P
(Constant)	16.387	1.270		12.907	.000***
FOMO	.345s	.052	.314	6.598	.000***

Note:  $R^2 = .099$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .096$ , ( $F = 43.533$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ \*\*\*)

Table 3 above shows the significant positive impact of Fear of missing out on phubbing behavior among Millennials.

**Table 4:** Means, Standard deviations and t-value of scores of male and female Phubbing behavior, on Loneliness Scale and FOMO Scale

Scales	Gender	N	M	SD	t	P
Phubbing	Male	170	25.00	7.358	-	.181
	Female	230	24.01	7.219		
Loneliness	Male	170	43.43	8.039	2.948	.003*
	Female	230	45.83	8.031		
FOMO	Male	170	23.37	6.456	.013	.990
	Female	230	23.38	6.732		

Note: N=400,  $d f = 396$ , \* $p < 0.05$ ,  $p > 0.05$

The results of the table 4 above illustrated that there is a significant difference in terms of loneliness and phubbing between males and females and there is no difference in terms of fear of missing out and phubbing between males and females.

The study's first hypothesis was that there would be a relationship between millennials' loneliness, fear of missing out, and phubbing. The findings support this theory, revealing that loneliness and fear of missing out have a major positive relationship among millennials. (see Table 1). Further, the second hypothesis of this study was that there would be a positive impact of loneliness on phubbing among millennials. The results accept this hypothesis and revealed that there is a significant impact of loneliness on phubbing behavior (see Table 2).

The third hypothesis of this study was that there would be a positive impact of Fear of missing out on phubbing among millennials. The results accept this hypothesis and revealed that there is significant impact of Fear of missing out on phubbing behavior (see Table 3). Moreover, the fourth

hypothesis of this study was that there would be differences among loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing in term of demographic variable (gender). The results accept this hypothesis and showed a significant difference in terms of loneliness and phubbing behavior between male and female. Females have high level of loneliness as compared to males. So, females are more phubbed than males. The results reject this hypothesis and revealed that there is an insignificant difference in terms fear of missing out and phubbing between male and female. So, phubbing behavior equally affects male and female (see Table 4).

### Conclusion

The research is conducted to explore the role of loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing among millennials. The findings all lead to the conclusion that there is a significant positive relationship between loneliness, fear of missing out and phubbing among millennials. There is a significant impact of loneliness and fear of missing out on phubbing behavior. But fear of missing out has a greater impact on phubbing behavior than loneliness among millennials. The results highlight that there is no difference between fear of missing out and phubbing in term of gender. So, phubbing behavior equally affects males and females while in case of loneliness, female shows high level of loneliness as compared to the males. So, phubbing behavior is high in females as compared than males.

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