The Digital Dilemma: Addiction of Internet, its Impact on Emotional Intelligence and Fear of Missing Out in Youth

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Abstract

This study is to determine the association between internet addiction, emotional intelligence, and young FOMO keeping that 64% of Pakistanis are under 30. While emotional intelligence is inversely correlated with both FOMO and online addiction, internet addiction is a major contributing factor to FOMO. using stratified random sampling and a correlational investigation. This study used stratified random sampling and a correlational research approach to investigate the connections between internet addiction, FOMO (fear of missing out), and emotional intelligence among youth. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between internet addiction and FOMO (r = .50, p < .01), while emotional intelligence was negatively correlated with both internet addiction (r = −.11, p < .01) and FOMO (r = −.08, p < .05). Stepwise regression analysis indicated that internet addiction significantly predicted, accounting for 26% of the variance. No significant gender differences found in levels of internet addiction, FOMO, or emotional intelligence. Similarly, ANOVA results showed that age did not significantly influence FOMO. These findings highlight the interplay between emotional intelligence and digital behavior in youth, suggesting important implications for interventions aimed at mitigating internet addiction and FOMO through emotional competence development.
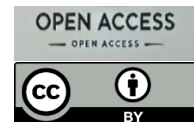
Introduction

Youth is often considered the future of any society or country. Pakistan has one of the largest young populations globally, with 64 percent of its population under the age of 30 (Hafeez & Fasih, 2018). There is growing concern that excessive internet use is adversely affecting the mental health of this demographic group. Research indicates that young people are particularly vulnerable to developing internet dependencies (Tomczyk & Solecki et al, 2019). In year 2020 and 2021, internet users surged by 11 million, and over 46 million individuals are now active on social media in Pakistan. Young et al. (1998) initially defined vigorous usage of internet and characterized it as an addictive disorder while further marking it

as low tolerance, obsession, and the inability to reduce internet usage. This phenomenon was characterized internet compulsion as a period conducive for pathological internet use (Beard, 2005). Internet addiction is associated with many mental health ailments, including substance use disorders, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), gambling, anxiety, melancholy, and frustration (Jorgenson et al, 2016; Karabel, Onur & Şimşek, 2024; Thomas, 2025).

Along with internet addiction, the phenomenon of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has also emerged as a growing concern in the modern era, significantly affecting individuals' mental health and well-being as they struggle with the constant pressure to stay connected and engaged. Social media channels have heightened individuals' anxiety when they're no longer informed about others' life events (Herman et al, 2000). FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out, is characterized by feelings of anxiety or distress arising from the belief that others are having rewarding or enjoyable experiences while one is excluded. This often leads to negative emotions, such as a diminished mood and a decrease in overall life satisfaction, as individuals struggle with the perception of missing out on social connections or opportunities. FOMO also play key role in increasing social media usage (Przybylski et al, 2013). Studies show that young adults & youngsters are mainly prone to FOMO (Barry et al, 2020; Rozgonjuk et al, 2021). Additionally, Milyavskaya et al. (2018) observed no major gender disparities within the experience of FOMO. Moreover, evidences have proven that individuals with excessive emotional regulation are much less likely to show case signs and symptoms of internet dependency and FOMO (Abdelhamid et al, 2021; Rajaraam et al, 2022).

Emotional intelligence is a kind of social skill that rheostat and interprets the behavior and emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It is not dependent on one thing, but is made up of many things including self-awareness, empathy, motivation, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills (Elliott et al., 2011; Beauchamp & Anderson, 2010; Carver & Scheier, 2001; Peters, 2015). Several studies reflected that internet dependency has a positive relation with FOMO. Wegmann et al. (2017) further highlighted in their research paper that people with higher internet dependence certainly experience higher levels of FOMO. Another study on gender differences found that gender does not influence FOMO in youth (Rozgonjuk et al, 2021). Moreover, previous literature proves that individuals with excessive usage of internet and depending on it have inverse relation with emotional intelligence (Abdelhamid et al, 2021). Another literature explained that internet addiction and FOMO have positive relationship and contribute significantly in cyberstalking (Yepes et al, 2025). The literature explores the

relationship between internet addiction and components of emotional intelligence among teenagers which indicates a noteworthy inverse relationship between the two (Far et al, 2014). Alexander et al. (2015) developed a framework suggesting that lack of emotional intelligence and self-regulation increases social anxiety, furthermore, low self-regulation contributes to addictive internet behaviors. Chen et al. (2022) found that emotionally stable individuals tend to experience significantly lower anxiety when they fail to find the information they were seeking. Another study by Sundvik et al. (2022) reported an inverse relationship between social media stress and emotional intelligence, and suggested that internet dependency triggers FOMO, which leads to emotional difficulties. Our study intends to discover the correlation between internet addiction, emotional intelligence and FOMO in youth. There is lack of evidence for the negative relation between emotional intelligence and FOMO. This study tends to address and fill the gap in existing research with finding a correlation between internet addiction and FOMO, while an indirect relationship among emotional intelligence, internet addiction and FOMO in youth. Additionally, FOMO as a predictor for internet addiction will be explored. Lastly, no significant differences anticipated in internet addiction, emotional intelligence and FOMO based on gender or age.

Materials and Procedures

Participants and Plan

This study implemented correlational research to explore the relationship among internet addiction, emotional intelligence and FOMO. The sample was composed of 600 university students (300 men and women respectively) from both public and non-public universities. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 22 years. Self-report questionnaires were used to assess the variables of interest. A stratified random sampling technique used, bifurcating the sample into two major starta, first as in public and private higher education institutions with the ratio of 50 percent each and then categorizing them into male and female students. In next phase, the sample is further categories in four strata, with students from each academic year (Year 1 to Year 4) represented in this study.

Procedures/Scales

Internet Addiction: The study applied Chen Internet Addiction Scale (CIAS), developed by Chen in 2003, a self-reporting tool which uses a 4-point Likert scale with response options from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" to measure

internet addiction. The scale comprises 26 components, with higher scores indicating higher internet dependency. By using this scale, excellent internal consistency was demonstrated with a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$.

Emotional Intelligence: The Emotional intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) which was developed in 1998 by Schutte. The assessment contained 33 questioners rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Certain questions were reverse-scored. The SSEIT also included four sub-scales i.e., emotional perception, utilization of emotions, management of self-relevant emotions, and management of others' emotions. It exhibited high reliability score reflected by a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$.

FOMO: The FOMO Scale, developed by Bowman and Clark-Gordon in 2019 was used to evaluate FOMO. This ten-components based self-reporting tool work on a 5-point Likert scale, and increase in scores represents higher level of FOMO. The scale demonstrated notable consistency showing Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$, while previous studies e.g., Lai et al. (2016) reported scale reliability as $\alpha = 0.87$ to 0.90.

Covariates: The study considered several covariates, including participants' age, gender, monthly family income, academic year (bachelor students from year 1 to 4), educational major (science or arts), type of institution (private sector or public), living arrangement (with family or in a hostel), family structure (joint or nuclear), residential area (urban or rural), and employment status (employed or unemployed).

Statistical Analysis

During this study, SPSS version 23 was deployed for data analysis, utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were applied to examine participants' demographic characteristics, including mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency for variables such as gender, age, education year, educational major, type of institution, living status, family income, residence, and employment status. This study implemented Reliability Analysis to assess the internal consistency, and in order to discover relationship between the key research variables, Pearson product-moment correlation employed, while Hierarchical Regression Analysis deployed to identify predictive variables. Furthermore, independent t-tests with analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also used to discover differences across study variables.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully observed in this study, with necessary permissions obtained from relevant institutions. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any stage.

Results

Reliability of Test Variables

In order to determine the internal consistency of the test variables, Cronbach's Alpha was deployed. The CIAS achieved excellent reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.91), indicating a high level of consistency. The FOMO Scale demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.78). The SSEIT demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.90) reflecting a higher degree of internal consistency. The internal consistency of the SSEIT sub-scales was found acceptable for 'Perception of Emotion' (Cronbach's α = 0.70) and 'Managing Others Emotions' (Cronbach's α = 0.70). The 'Managing Own Emotion' sub-scale showed satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.74). However, the sub-scale 'Utilization of Emotion' had weaker internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.64), which is below the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

(Refer to Table 1 for detailed psychometric properties of the Internet Addiction, FOMO, and Emotional Intelligence scales across the sample of N = 600).

Table 1: Psychometric Properties for Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence and FOMO (N=600)

Scale	*M*	*SD*	Range	Cronbach' α
CIAS	64.95	16.18	26-118	.91
FOMO Scale	27.10	8.63	10-83	.78
SSEIT	117.13	21.57	37.185	.90
Emotion Perception	34.62	6.95	13-76	.70
Management of self-Emotions	32.30	6.72	9-63	.74
Management of Others Emotion	28.01	5.93	8-59	.70
Utilization of Emotion	22.17	5.13	6-61	.64

Note: SSEIT= Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test.

Correlation Between Study Variables

The analysis revealed notable correlation between internet addiction and FOMO ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). Internet addiction was found to have an inverse relation with emotional intelligence ($r = - .11$, $p < .01$). Additionally, FOMO showed a significant negative correlation with emotional intelligence ($r = - .08$, $p < .05$). A strong positive correlation with overall emotional intelligence was demonstrated by the "Perception of Emotion" sub-scale ($r = .87$, $p < .01$). Correlations with emotional intelligence were also shared by the "Managing Own Emotions" ($r = - .088$, $p < .01$), "Managing Others' Emotions" ($r = - .08$, $p < .01$), and "Utilization of Emotion" ($r = - .08$, $p < .01$) sub-scales.

Furthermore, a negative correlation with internet addiction ($r = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$) and FOMO ($r = -0.12$, $p < 0.01$) was shown by "Perception of Emotion." Similarly, "Managing Own Emotions" was negatively correlated with both internet addiction ($r = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$) and FOMO ($r = -0.10$, $p < 0.01$).

(Refer to Table 2 for detailed correlations between study variables).

Table 2: Correlational Analyses for Internet Addiction, FOMO and Emotional Intelligence (N=600)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Internet Addiction			-	.50**	-.11**	-.17**	-.13**	-.03	-.03	-.06	-.01	-.00	.02	.00
FOMO				-	-.08*	-.12**	-.10**	-.00	-.03	-.06	.04	.00	.01	.04
Emotional Intelligence					-	.87**	.88**	.87**	.84**	.05	.05	-.00	.03	-.05
Perception of Emotion						-	.68**	.67**	.63**	.02	.04	.00	.07	-.05
Manage Own Emotions							-	.69**	.66**	.03	.05	-.00	.03	-.06
Manage Other' Emotions								-	.70**	.07	.02	.00	-.00	-.04
Utilization of Emotion									-	.06	.04	-.03	-.00	-.01
Gender										-	-.03	.16**	-.04	-.05
Institute Type											-	.04	.12**	.05
Family System												-	.02	.02
Living Status													-	.12**
Age														-

**p< .01, *p< .05

Note: Two-tailed Regression Analysis

The R² value of 0.26 in step 1 of the hieratical regression analysis indicated that 26% of variance in FOMO was explained, with $F (1, 598) = 201.254$, $p < .001$. The results indicate internet addiction as a key determinant of FOMO ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$).

(See Table 3 for the stepwise hierarchical regression outcomes for internet addiction, emotional intelligence and FOMO, N = 600).

Table 3: Results of Hierarchical Regression for Internet Addiction, FOMO and Emotional Intelligence (N = 600)

Variable	B	95%CI		SE B	β	R^2	R^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1							
Constant	9.72***	7.24	12.20	1.26		.26	.26***
CIAS	.268***	.23	.30	.02	.50***		

Independent Sample t-test

There has been no difference found in internet addiction between men and women [t (598) = 1.64, p = .00]. The findings also indicated that both men (M = 66.03, SD = 17.32) and women (M = 63.86, SD = 14.91) have similar levels of internet addiction, with insignificant gender differences observed. A Cohen's d value of 0.12 (less than 0.20) was found, suggesting a negligible effect of gender on internet addiction. Similarly, there has been no difference between men (M = 27.6, SD = 9.42) and women (M = 26.54, SD = 7.73) [t (598) = 1.61, p = .003] on FOMO, suggesting that gender has no impact on FOMO, with a minor effect reflected by Cohen's d value 0.13 (less than 0.20), for gender on this variable. Lastly, there has been no gender difference [t (598) = -1.24, p = 0.2], with men (M = 116.0, SD = 23.0) and women (M = 118.2, SD = 20.0) showing similar levels of emotional intelligence. A Cohen's d value of 0.09 (less than 0.20) indicated a small effect size, gender had insignificant effect on individual components of emotional intelligence.

(Refer to Table 4 for details).

Table 4: Independent Sample T-Test for Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence, and FOMO across Gender.

Variables	Men		Women		t (598)	p	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*S.D*			
Internet Addiction	66.03	17.32	63.86	14.91	1.64	.10	0.13
FOMO	27.6	9.42	26.54	7.73	1.61	.10	0.12
Emotional Intelligence	116.0	23.0	118.2	20.0	-1.24	.21	0.09
*PE	34.46	7.58	34.7	6.28	-.56	.57	0.03
**MOE	32.10	7.08	32.51	6.35	-74	.45	0.06
***Mo'E	27.59	6.15	28.4	5.69	-1.74	.08	0.13
****UOE	21.86	5.37	22.48	4.86	-1.48	.13	0.12

Note: *PE= perception of emotions; **MOE= managing own emotions; ***Mo'E= managing others emotions; ****UOE= utilization of emotion

Analysis of Variance

The table presents mean, standard deviation, and F-values for internet addiction and FOMO across all the age groups of participants. The findings indicated no significant difference in FOMO across age groups [$F(3, 596) = 0.87$, $p > 0.001$]. The η² value was 0.00 (< 0.20), indicating an extremely small effect size for FOMO. Post-hoc comparisons revealed mean differences between each group and the other groups.

(See Table 5).

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and One Way Analysis of Variance in FOMO across Age of the Subjects.

| Variables | 17 Years | | 18 Years | | 19 Years | | 20 Years | | 21 Years | | 22 Years | | 23 Years | | F (3, 593) |
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
FOMO	26.5	9.19	25.8	9.12	27.2	8.89	26.9	8.84	26.5	7.74	28.5	9.54	26.6	9.95	.87

Discussion

To our best understanding, this is an early framework where we identified an inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and FOMO in youth. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated the validity of the given hypothesis within the established framework, providing strong support for its conclusions. Our research analysis clearly indicate that internet addiction has a significant relationship with FOMO, which aligns with previous literature. Fuster et al. (2017) identified a significant positive correlation between internet addiction and FOMO.

Since these variables closely linked and progress in parallel, their study confirms their alignment. Similarly, Elahi et al. (2018) highlighted that FOMO is a key factor driving phone usage among teenagers, emphasizing that FOMO and internet addiction reinforce each other. Harorli & Harorli, (2024) also showed a moderate positive relationship between FOMO and internet addiction in their study. Another research supported the notion that FOMO has strong direct positive relationship with internet addiction (Zhu, Lian & Fan, 2024).

Similarly, one of the latest edition explained that social anxiety significantly positively correlated with internet addiction (Zhu et al., 2025). The study's main hypothesis was that there was a negative correlation between emotional

intelligence and internet addiction. This theory is supported by an increasing amount of research showing that those with greater degrees of internet addiction typically have worse emotional intelligence. A consistent inverse association between these two variables was discovered by (Arbabisarjou et al., 2016), indicating that excessive internet use may affect a person's capacity to recognise, comprehend, and successfully regulate emotions.

In a similar vein, Zewude et al. (2024) found that internet addiction has a direct effect on mental health in addition to having a detrimental effect on emotional intelligence. These results emphasized the possible psychological repercussions of problematic internet usage and the value of developing emotional intelligence as a buffer against the negative impacts of excessive digital use. The results of this study support this viewpoint by showing a statistically significant inverse association between emotional intelligence and internet addiction, which helps to empirically validate this relationship in the context of young people's behaviour.

The current study examined the link between emotional intelligence and FOMO, assuming a negative correlation between the two variables, as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and online addiction. The findings supported this hypothesis, revealing a statistically significant inverse relationship, thereby making a meaningful contribution to the literature. While emotional intelligence has been widely studied in relation to various psychological and behavioral outcomes, direct empirical investigations into its relationship with FOMO remain relatively scarce. This novel insight adds to the emerging understanding of how emotional competencies may buffer individuals against the psychological vulnerabilities associated with FOMO, particularly among youth. Supporting evidence from recent literature further validates this relationship. Barberis et al. (2023) found that FOMO was positively associated with increased social media engagement, problematic social media use, and traits from the Dark Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), while being negatively associated with trait emotional intelligence. These findings suggest that individuals with lower emotional intelligence may be more prone to experiencing FOMO due to difficulties in emotional regulation and social comparison. Additionally, existing research has explored the broader psychological implications of low emotional intelligence and excessive internet use, including heightened social anxiety and impaired well-being (Rajaraam, 2022; Alexander et al., 2015). Moreover, previous studies have identified smartphone addiction as a significant predictor of FOMO. Gezgin (2018) demonstrated a direct link between smartphone overuse and increased FOMO, emphasizing how mobile technology can intensify individuals' fear of social exclusion. Similarly, Li et al.

(2022) reported that smartphone addiction further elevate FOMO levels, indicating a reciprocal relationship that reinforces compulsive digital behaviors. Taken together, these findings underscore the complex interplay between emotional intelligence, technology use, and FOMO, highlighting the importance of emotional skills training and digital literacy in mitigating the psychological risks associated with modern digital life.

Current study proposed that gender does not have a significant influence on internet addiction, FOMO, or emotional intelligence. The results of the analyses supported this hypothesis, revealing no statistically significant gender-based differences across these variables. This finding is in alignment with prior research suggesting that emotional intelligence does not significantly differ between males and females. Nasir and Masrur (2010) reported no notable variations in emotional intelligence based on gender, reinforcing the view that emotional competence is not inherently linked to sex-based traits. In a similar vein, studies have found limited evidence to support the idea that gender plays a decisive role in shaping patterns of internet use or the experience of FOMO. Khan et al. (2017), Rozgonjuk et al. (2021), and Swain et al. (2024) all concluded that gender is not a consistent predictor of internet addiction or FOMO, highlighting the increasingly universal nature of these digital-age phenomena. These studies suggest that regardless of gender, individuals are similarly susceptible to the psychological and behavioral effects of digital technology, such as compulsive internet use and the persistent anxiety associated with missing social experiences.

Additionally, the study examined the influence of age on FOMO using ANOVA analysis and found no significant differences among age groups. This result corroborates earlier findings by Barry and Wong (2020), who observed that age does not serve as a major determinant of FOMO. Their work indicates that the fear of missing out is a pervasive experience across various age cohorts, particularly in contexts where digital connectivity and social media play central roles in daily life. Collectively, these findings reinforce the idea that internet addiction, FOMO, and emotional intelligence are less influenced by demographic factors such as gender and age, and more closely tied to individual psychological traits and digital engagement patterns. This insight has practical implications for the design of interventions and educational programs, which may be more effective when tailored to address behavioral and emotional dimensions rather than demographic categories.

This research has limitations despite its contributions. First, data was taken only from Lahore, Pakistan, which would limit the findings' applicability to other areas

or cultural situations. Second, there is a potential for response bias by the use of self-reported measures. Third, replies could have been swayed by social desirability due to space limitations and privacy concerns during data collection, which might have affected the data's accuracy. Last but not least, the study had trouble getting a diverse sample since many academic institutions refused to allow data collection from their students, which limited the participation of both public and private institutions i.e. universities.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relation among internet addiction, emotional intelligence, and FOMO in youth. The findings revealed a positive relationship between higher levels of addiction related to internet and greater FOMO, with internet addiction identified as a significant predictor of this fear. A strong correlation was discovered between internet addiction and FOMO, whereas internet addiction demonstrated negative correlation with emotional intelligence. Similarly, emotional intelligence showed a negative correlation with FOMO. The T-test results revealed that gender had neither a significant influence on internet addiction, nor on emotional intelligence, nor on FOMO. Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA demonstrated that age had no notable impact on FOMO. These outcomes highlight the strong relationship between internet addiction and emotional intelligence, while suggesting that gender and age do not play significant roles in these dynamics.

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