

# Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)? Exposing the Link Between the Self and the FoMO Through Self-Construal

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## Abstract

With the advent of social media, it is getting easier to be informed about different aspects of individuals' lives. Therefore, experiencing fear of missing out (FoMO), which is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with others, is becoming increasingly widespread among people. The concept of FoMO has drawn considerable attention from researchers; however, past research has yet to expose the link between the self-concept and FoMO. Drawing on the self-construal theory, we argue that the construal of the interdependent self underlies FoMO. In other words, the current article proposes that people with interdependent self-construal are more vulnerable to FoMO. In Study 1, we conducted online survey research with 566 MTurk participants, 287 U.S. participants and 279 Indian participants. In Study 2, we conducted an experiment with two conditions with 188 MTurk participants residing in the United States. The findings from the two studies provide consistent and convergent findings that FoMO is positively associated with interdependent self-construal. Implications are discussed and further research suggestions are provided.

## Keywords

fear of missing out, FoMO, interdependent self, self-construal

Social networking sites (SNSs) are compelling platforms in which people build their own virtual reality. With the advent of technological developments in the World Wide Web and computer systems, people can easily connect with this virtual life platform. This convenience comes at a cost in that people are getting addicted to staying online. Previous research has found that Facebook users feel pressured to access the Facebook site frequently (Fox & Moreland, 2015). This finding suggests that people are somewhat similar to electronic devices, which need to be charged. Meanwhile, SNSs are somewhat similar to charging points. Furthermore, recent survey study showed that high school students struggle with both perceived stress from not being popular on Facebook and perceived stress from not belonging on Facebook (Beyens, Frison, &

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Eggermont, 2016). This finding also supports the view that people's interaction with SNSs can get out of control. However, why do people overuse SNS? One plausible explanation is the fear of missing out (FoMO), which has been described by previous studies (Beyens et al., 2016; Buglass, Binder, Betts, & Underwood, 2017; Lai, Altavilla, Ronconi, & Aceto, 2016; Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013).

FoMO refers to "experiencing a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1841). Although the literature on FoMO includes numerous exploratory studies (Hayran, Anik, & Gurhan-Canli, 2016; Rifkin, Cindy, & Kahn, 2015), little has been written regarding theoretical explanations of FoMO. Thus far, FoMO has been discussed in terms of the self-determination theory (Przybylski et al., 2013) and the need-to-belong theory (Lai et al., 2016). The former approach proposes that deficits in psychological needs increase the sensitivity to FoMO on things; therefore, this sensitivity leads to social media usage, which satisfies psychological needs. On the contrary, the need-to-belong theory proposes that FoMO is driven by uncertainty regarding social belonging. The higher the degree of need to belong, the higher the probability of experiencing FoMO. Although the studies that have drawn on the self-determination theory and the need-to-belong theory have contributed to our understanding of FoMO, they could not provide a comprehensive understanding of the association between the self and FoMO.

To fill this knowledge gap, this study examined FoMO from the perspective of the self-construal theory, proposing that the way in which people construe their selves shapes their FoMO experience. To this end, we assert that FoMO is mainly about what other people are currently doing; therefore, if an individual evaluates those other people as a part of herself/himself, the likelihood of experiencing FoMO would be higher. Drawing on the self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we hypothesized that FoMO is positively associated with interdependent self-construal. Because people with interdependent self-construal evaluate other people around them as a part of their selves (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), they will be more concerned with what other people around them are doing.

The contributions of the current article are fourfold. First, this study is the first attempt to examine FoMO from the perspective of how people construe their selves, shedding light on the link between the self-concept and FoMO experience. Second, in the current article, a novel theoretical understanding of FoMO is proposed based on the self-construal theory. Third, this article provides an interesting approach to understanding the cross-cultural nature of FoMO. Finally, the current article has the potential to contribute to the cross-cultural psychology literature by unveiling the relationship between the interdependent self-construal and FoMO. Particularly, a growing body of research has investigated the association of self-construal with self-awareness (Maas, van Assen, van Balkom, Rutten, & Bekker, 2019), decision-making style (Hong & Chang, 2015), and dark traits (Jonason et al., 2017). The findings of these previous research can be further expanded based on the theoretical background of the current article. Furthermore, given that FoMO is positively related to interdependent self-construal, cross-cultural differences in life satisfaction differences (Park & Huebner, 2005; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998) could be further discussed.

## Theoretical Background

### *FoMO*

Life is not only about what we are doing but also about what others are doing. People are intrinsically concerned about what others are doing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Indeed, this characteristic is one of the underlying factors that make human beings social animals (Baumeister, 2005). Although people's inclination to be concerned with what others are doing is ubiquitous and

well-documented, a detailed conceptualization of the nature of this trait and factors that influence it has yet to be proposed (Przybylski et al., 2013). According to Przybylski et al. (2013), people desire to stay connected with what others are doing. Therefore, they experience FoMO, which Przybylski et al. (2013, p. 1841) defined as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.” The conceptualization of FoMO has drawn considerable attention from researchers across different disciplines (Baker, Krieger, & LeRoy, 2016; Hodkinson, 2016; Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, & Koestner, 2018; Riordan, Flett, Hunter, Scarf, & Conner, 2015).

The descriptive findings from the survey data surprisingly demonstrated that more than half of the participants experienced FoMO in their daily lives. Furthermore, FoMO happens mostly in situations involving friends (Rifkin et al., 2015). Specifically, people who are missing a social event which their friends are expected to enjoy are highly likely to experience FoMO. The extent to which FoMO is experienced might fluctuate across situations. Recent research on students studying abroad supports this idea in that students exhibited more FoMO when they were studying abroad (Hetz, Dawson, & Cullen, 2015). FoMO is also evaluated as a trait, and it may have neural roots in brain systems. Another study also revealed the link between FoMO, need to belong, and patterns of brain activity (Lai et al., 2016). In this study, the participants in the social exclusion condition showed greater activation of the left temporal-parietal junction, which was evaluated as an indicator of the need to belong. Thus, it was concluded that FoMO is related to people's need to belong because people need to stay connected with others and the lack of this connection leads to FoMO. This conclusion is consistent with the idea that FoMO is an outcome of human beings' need to connect with others (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Another situational factor that has been shown to influence the FoMO is the time of the day. A recent study utilizing the experience sampling method found that the FoMO is commonly experienced later in the day and later in the week (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). The same study also provided evidence that experiencing the FoMO is related to the negative affect and increased stress. This finding suggests that the FoMO is detrimental to people's emotional state. Consistent with that notion, experiencing the FoMO can lead to higher alcohol consumption (Riordan et al., 2015). However, it is getting difficult to refrain from experiencing the FoMO due to the proliferation of social media, which facilitates the awareness of experiences that one is missing out (Wortham, 2011). The findings from an online study conducted with 386 undergraduate students suggested that FoMO is positively associated with the use of social media (Baker et al., 2016). Furthermore, it was also found that FoMO explains the association of the excessive use of social media with decreased self-esteem (Buglass et al., 2017). That is, the detrimental cycle of excessive use of SNS guided by the FoMO has a negative effect on self-esteem.

The conceptualization of FoMO has been criticized, as it has been claimed that it is all about feeling rather than fearing. According to this critique, FoMO is really

a feeling of missing out, which is defined as the negative affective state that individuals encounter as a result of becoming aware of the fleeting favorable and self-relevant experiences that are taking place in the environment from which they are absent. (Hayran et al., 2016, p. 2)

This definition conceptually adopts the view that FoMO is all about awareness of favorable and self-relevant experiences in an environment from which one is absent. Three antecedents of FoMO were proposed (Hayran et al., 2016), including (a) favorability of the experiences one is missing, (b) self-relevance of the missed experiences, and (c) popularity of the missed experiences. That is to say, to experience FoMO, one first needs to perceive the experience that one is missing as favorable and desirable. Second, the experience should be perceived as relevant to one's self and life experiences. Third, the experience should be highly popular among others.

In sum, although FoMO can be associated with negative psychological outcomes for human beings, it is becoming widespread in social life. Furthermore, the future development in the technology area will probably facilitate the awareness of the others' experiences. It is probably safe to assume that FoMO will be ubiquitous in the future; therefore, understanding the underlying logic of FoMO might prevent the further detrimental effects of the FoMO.

### *Self-Construal*

The self is one of the central elements of a person's identity. Although numerous definitions of the self have been proposed in the past, we believe that Baumeister (1999, p. 2) provided the most concise and clear definition of the self, which is "the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is." According to this definition, the self is an intrinsic phenomenon that people form through an introspective evaluation of themselves. This evaluation is hardly an objective process. The self can be construed or conceptually represented in multiple ways (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Furthermore, these different construals of the self are contingent on the culture (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012).

A seminal article by Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed the self-construal theory to conceptualize the ways in which the self interacts with culture. The self-construal theory proposes that the self can be construed as independent or interdependent. As an independent self-construal, the self is conceptualized as an autonomous and independent. Independent construal of the self has also been labeled as individualistic, egocentric, idiocentric, and self-contained. Individuals with independent self-construal are more prevalent in Western cultures because the autonomy of the person is heavily emphasized in this type of culture. On the contrary, as an interdependent self-construal, the self is conceptualized as a part of various interpersonal relationships. Individuals with interdependent self-construal struggle to construe their selves without their relationships and group memberships because their self is interdependent on others. Consequently, the relationship between the self and others depicts the person not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others. Interdependent construal of the self is also labeled as collective, allocentric, connected, and relational. Individuals with interdependent self-construal are more prevalent in non-Western cultures, and they insist on the connectedness of human beings with each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012). In sum, the self-construal theory postulates that people can have independent self-construal or interdependent self-construal.

Although the self-concept can be construed in two different ways, people can develop both independent and interdependent self simultaneously. In other words, these two aspects of self can exist simultaneously within the individual (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Therefore, it is not plausible to treat independent and interdependent self-construals as two extremes of the same dimension. Rather, they should be conceptualized as different aspects of the self-concept. Everybody has an independent and interdependent components of their selves (Kiuchi, 2006); however, some of them might have an independent self or interdependent self that is more salient. Nevertheless, mild discordance between the independent and interdependent view of self should be acknowledged. Empirical findings regarding the relationship between independent and interdependent self-construal also support this view by demonstrating a low to moderate negative relationship between the two views of self (Jonason et al., 2017; Wang & Wang, 2016). These results suggest that having a salient interdependent self does not necessarily indicate a low level of independence or vice versa. Similarly, it was recently discussed that American people are currently experiencing the harmony of independence and interdependence (Markus, 2017). In sum, categorizing people as having either an independent self or interdependent self might lead to a misleading understanding of the self-construal. Rather, people should be

described as having a salient independent or salient interdependent self to prevent the misconceptualization of the self-construal.

Understanding the ways in which people construe themselves has contributed our understanding of the nature of human beings and the effects of culture on human's nature. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that Chinese participants had a higher preference for brands in an assimilation frame than in a differentiation frame, whereas American participants had higher preference levels for products if they were presented in a differentiation frame (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001). This finding also explains why independent construal of the self is prevalent in Western cultures and why interdependent construal of the self is prevalent in Eastern cultures. People from Western cultures are more motivated to be different from others; however, people from non-Western cultures are more motivated to be similar to others.

Hong and Chang (2015) showed that self-construal also influences decision making. The results from six experiments showed that an independent self-construal promotes a greater reliance on feelings in making judgments and decisions, whereas an interdependent self-construal promotes a greater reliance on reasons. Thus, the construal of the self can change the relative importance of feelings and reason for decision making. Consistent with this finding, it was recently demonstrated that people with independent self-construal tend to adopt an analytical thinking style while people with interdependent self-construal tend to adopt a holistic thinking style (Mao, Li, Desai, & Jain, 2016).

The self-construal literature has reported some interesting findings. The findings from a cross-sectional study performed on 316 junior high school students provided support for the positive relationship between independent self-construal and creativity (Wang & Wang, 2016). Furthermore, this relationship was found to be contingent on regulatory focus (Jin, Wang, & Dong, 2016). Independent construal of the self leads to a promotion focus, which in turn positively affects creativity. The way people construe themselves can also affect social media use. Interdependent self-construal is associated with social motivations to use SNS (Kim, Kim, & Nam, 2010). Furthermore, a survey study based on 463 Facebook users showed that people with interdependent self-construal were more willing to disclose their information in online SNS-based environments, such as Facebook (Chen & Marcus, 2012). In addition, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) activities on SNSs were found to be high among people with interdependent self-construal because they aim to maintain their connection with others through sharing their ideas (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2012). Thus, social media provide a platform through which people can either increase or decrease their connectedness with others.

### ***The Current Research***

Although FoMO has been theoretically discussed from the perspectives of the self-determination theory (Przybylski et al., 2013) and the need-to-belong theory (Lai et al., 2016), how and why the self-concept is linked to FoMO experience is still unclear. The current research aims to reveal the mechanism that mediates the relationship between the self-concept and FoMO. To this end, we adopted the self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) to explain the link between the self-concept and FoMO.

As mentioned previously, the self-construal theory proposes that the self could be construed in an independent and/or an interdependent way (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Independent construal of the self includes the positioning of the self as separate from others, whereas interdependent construal of the self includes the positioning of the self in connection with others. In addition, while self-defining and inner attributes are more important for the independent self, enhancing relatedness and fostering a connection with others are more critical for the interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, we argue that people with interdependent self-construal would be more concerned with what others are doing. Given that FoMO emanates mainly from

the rewarding experience(s) that the person is missing but others are experiencing (Przybylski et al., 2013), we believe that interdependent construal of the self underlies the FoMO. Thus, we hypothesized that interdependent self-construal will be positively associated with the FoMO.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Interdependent self-construal is positively linked to the FoMO.

This article sheds further light on the psychological basis of the FoMO. We expect to provide consistent and convergent support for the idea that interdependent self-construal increases the likelihood of experiencing the FoMO. That is, because interdependent construal of the self motivates people to continue to foster the connectedness of the self with others, people with interdependent self-construal are more concerned with what others are doing, which is the main characteristic of the FoMO. To reveal the link between how the self is construed and the FoMO, the current article opens a new avenue for understanding the cross-cultural nature of the FoMO. Indeed, the framework developed in the current article could be used to understand why people from non-Western cultures experience the FoMO more frequently than do people from Western cultures.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we aimed to test our hypothesis using the data collected from an individualistic culture in which people are less inclined to develop the independent self and a collectivist culture in which people are more inclined to develop interdependent self (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2013). Given that previous research based on self-construal theory has consistently demonstrated that an independent self is prevalent among people who live in individualistic cultures and an interdependent self is prevalent among people who live in collectivist cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Triandis, 1995), testing our hypothesis with data collected from both an individualistic and a collectivist culture would be advantageous. In the first study, in addition to examining the relationship between an interdependent self-construal and the FoMO, we compared Indian and the U.S. samples on the FoMO to provide further support for our hypothesis. Because people with a salient interdependent self-construal are expected to be more common in the Indian sample, we rationalized that this comparison can provide additional cross-cultural support for our hypothesis.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** The participants were 600 adults (48.2% female, age range = 19-68,  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.16$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.21$ ) recruited from MTurk, which is a crowdsourcing web platform that coordinates the supply and the demand of tasks that require human intelligence to complete (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010, p. 411), restricted to individuals with an approval rating of 95% or greater who reside in either India ( $N = 300$ ) or the United States ( $N = 300$ ). The data from Indian adults and U.S. adults were collected separately through two different human intelligence tasks (HITs). The participants were financially compensated US\$0.50 in exchange for their participation. In addition, we excluded the data from 34 participants. Specifically, seven U.S. participants (three women, four men) and eight Indian participants (four women, four men) were aware of the real aim of the experiment, and six U.S. participants and (three women, three men) 13 Indian participants (five women, eight men) were excluded due to failure to respond correctly to the attention check question. This left a total of 566 participants, 287 U.S. adults, and 279 Indian adults aged 19 to 68 years (274 women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.69$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.17$ ) for the final analyses.

**Table 1.** Observed Correlations Between Variables in Study 1 ( $N = 566$ ).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Age	36.69	9.17	—			
2. Sex	—	—	.08	—		
3. Fear of missing out	4.55	1.21	-.16**	.06	—	
4. Independent self-construal	4.21	1.24	-.13**	.08	-.09	—
5. Interdependent self-construal	4.39	1.15	.17**	.05	.54***	-.10*

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

Prior to beginning the survey, the participants read and signed the informed consent form. All participants agreed to participate in our study. Following the informed consent page, the participants were able to access our questionnaire that contained a battery of demographic items and the measures of FoMO and self-construal. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked and paid.

**Measures.** The FoMO was measured using the 10-item Fear of Missing Out scale (Przybylski et al., 2013). Sample items include, “I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me” and “I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me.” The participants reported their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This measure ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) has been demonstrated to have adequate reliability in both Indian and U.S. sample, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .78 and .81, respectively.

Self-construal was examined using the 24-item Self-Construal scale (Singelis, 1994). The scale assesses independent and interdependent self-construals with 12 items measuring each construct. Thus, the scale contains independent self-construal subscale (e.g., *I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards, I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects*) and interdependent self-construal subscale (e.g., *It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group, My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me*). The participants reported their level of agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). For both Indian ( $\alpha_{\text{independent}} = .77$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{interdependent}} = .79$ ) and U.S. samples ( $\alpha_{\text{independent}} = .80$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{interdependent}} = .79$ ), the independent self-construal ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and interdependent self-construal ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) subscales demonstrated adequate reliabilities.

## Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables. To provide evidence that interdependent self-construal is positively associated with the FoMO, a Pearson correlation was conducted. A significant positive correlation emerged between interdependent self-construal and FoMO,  $r(564) = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = 1.28$ , which supports H1. On the contrary, we found no significant relationship between independent self-construal and FoMO,  $r(564) = -.09$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $d = .16$ .

To check whether our Indian and U.S. participants differed in independent and interdependent self-construals, we conducted an independent samples  $t$  test. The U.S. participants ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) were more likely to have an independent self-construal compared with Indian participants,  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ;  $t(564) = 5.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.33$ . In contrast, Indian participants ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) were more likely to have an interdependent self-construal compared with U.S. participants ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $t(564) = 6.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.66$ . Furthermore, we

found that Indian participants ( $M = 5.64$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) had a higher FoMO than did U.S. participants ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $t(564) = 3.46$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = 1.81$ . This finding further supports H1.

## Discussion

The findings of Study 1 provide supported our hypothesis in that the participants with interdependent self-construal had a higher degree of FoMO compared with the participants with independent self-construal. However, this result was based on cross-sectional data in which self-construal was operationalized from the trait perspective and measured using a psychometric scale. Although survey design facilitates collecting a large amount of data from numerous individuals, it is almost impossible to rule out alternative explanations for the FoMO-self-construal relationship. To overcome this weakness, we operationalized the state of self-construal in a between-subjects experimental design in which self-construals of the participants were momentarily manipulated.

## Study 2

In Study 2, we aimed to test our hypothesis using a between-subjects experimental design. Some previous research on the self-construal theory (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Hong & Chang, 2015; Zhang & Shrum, 2009) has manipulated self-construal by asking the participants to read two versions of a paragraph that differed only with respect to whether the pronouns were independent (e.g., I, mine) or interdependent (e.g., we, ours). By priming the participants to adopt interdependent self-construal, we were able to test the causal relationship between the interdependent self-construal and FoMO. The state-based operationalization of self-construal allows one to rule out alternative explanations of FoMO.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** To determine the appropriate sample size, a power analysis was conducted (G\*Power; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) and indicated that in each condition, 80 participants were required to achieve a statistical power of .80 with  $\alpha = .05$  and an estimated effect size of Cohen's  $d = 0.45$ . We anticipated attrition rate of approximately 20%. Therefore, we recruited 200 adults (48.1% female, age range = 18-69,  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.79$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.34$ ) from MTurk, restricted to individuals with an approval rating of 95% or greater who reside in the United States. The participants received US\$0.50 in exchange for their participation. We had to exclude 12 participants from the analyses because they failed the attention check question. Luckily, these excluded participants were equally distributed across the two conditions. Therefore, the final sample size consisted of 188 participants (94 for each condition).

The participants first read and then signed the informed consent form to affirm that they had read it and agree to participate. The participants were then randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Our conditions were a control condition and an interdependent self-construal condition. In the control condition, the participants provided their responses to the battery of items without reading any paragraph. In the interdependent self-construal condition, the participants completed the battery of items after reading a descriptive paragraph (a story about a trip to the city) that contained 19 pronouns with almost all of the pronouns referring to we, our, us, or ourselves (see the appendix). This priming manipulation has been widely used to manipulate interdependent self-construal in past studies (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Choi, Connor, Wason, & Kahan, 2016; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). All participants completed the 12-item scale of the Interdependent Self-Construal (Singelis, 1994). We used this measure to check whether our



**Table 2.** Observed Correlations Between Variables in Study 2 ( $N = 188$ ).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Age	38.79	10.34	—			
2. Sex	—	—	.05	—		
3. Fear of missing out	4.56	1.16	-.20***	.08	—	
4. Interdependent self-construal	4.61	1.17	.18***	.04	.51***	.60***

\*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

priming manipulation was successful. Next, the participants completed the 10-item Fear of Missing Out scale (Przybylski et al., 2013). Finally, before being thanked and paid, the participants reported demographic information.

**Measures.** Using the same measures as in Study 1, the participants' agreement with statements on the FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013) and Interdependent Self-Construal (Singelis, 1994) was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). FoMO scale ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ). Interdependent Self-Construal scale ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) demonstrated an adequate reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .83.

## Results

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables. To verify that the priming of interdependent self-construal was successful, independent samples  $t$  test was conducted. As expected, the participants who were assigned to interdependent self-construal condition ( $M = 5.66$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) reported greater interdependent self-construal compared with the participants who were assigned to the control condition ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ),  $t(280) = 8.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.78$ . This finding suggests that our priming manipulation was successful.

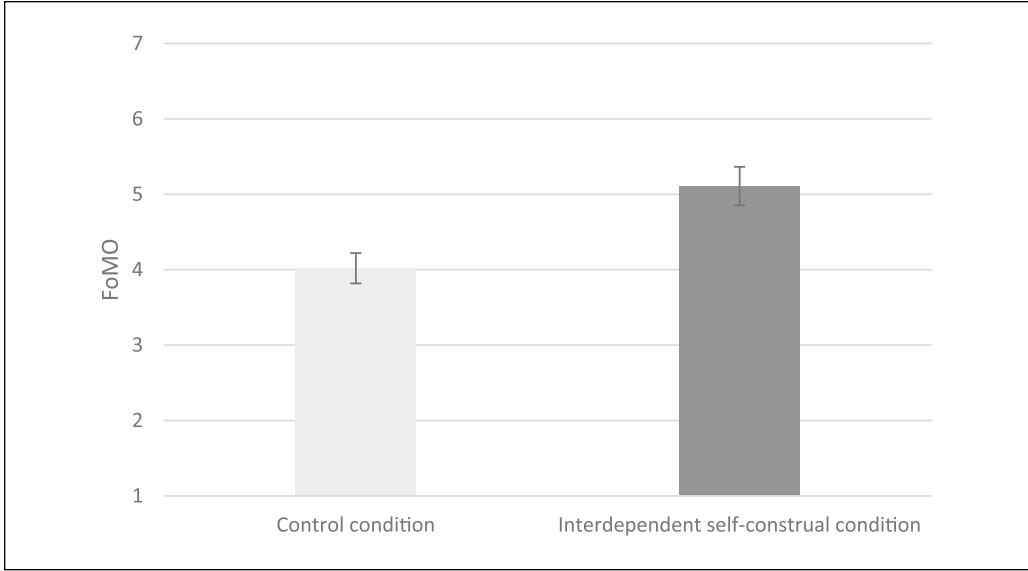
Independent samples  $t$  test was also performed to test our hypothesis (see Figure 1). Compared with the participants who were assigned to the control condition ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), the participants who were assigned to the interdependent self-construal condition ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) had a higher level of FoMO,  $t(186) = 6.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 1.10$ . Thus, H1 was supported.

## Discussion

The findings of Study 2 provide support for our hypothesis in which we proposed that the participants primed to temporarily have an interdependent self-construal had a higher degree of FoMO compared with the participants who were not primed. The experimental design in which self-construal was manipulated allowed us to rule out alternative explanations of the relationship between interdependent self-construal and FoMO.

## General Discussion

Two studies provide convergent evidence that the interdependent self-construal increases the likelihood of experiencing the FoMO. In Study 1, the interdependent self-construal was operationalized using psychometric scale items. Online survey data collected from 287 U.S. participants and 279 Indian participants were analyzed to test our hypothesis. The findings of this study indicate that the interdependent self-construal is positively associated with the FoMO. In Study 2, 188 U.S. participants were randomly assigned to either control condition or interdependent



**Figure 1.** Bar chart representation of the hypothesis test.  
 Note. Error bars represent standard errors. FoMO = fear of missing out.

self-construal condition. The findings of the second study demonstrated that FoMO was greater for the participants primed with an interdependent self-construal.

First, this article makes a unique contribution to the literature on FoMO by proposing a theoretical framework based on the self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) to account for the relationship between the self and FoMO. The current research demonstrated that FoMO is positively associated with and caused by an interdependent self-construal. The underlying logic of this finding is that when a person develops a self-concept of which other people are a part, a person will be more inclined to wonder about what others are doing. Because other people constitute a part of the self, desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing is inevitable (Markus & Kitayama, 1995, 2010). People with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to value connectedness (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012); thereby, they might experience the FoMO due to the perceived disconnect with other people around them. That is, FoMO could be one of the symptoms of people with an interdependent self who are struggling with loneliness problem.

Second, the cross-cultural nature of FoMO has not been examined in previous research. This article is a first attempt to provide evidence of the cross-cultural nature of FoMO through making a comparison between U.S. participants and Indian participants. Our findings showed that Indian participants who have a salient interdependent self have a higher degree of FoMO compared with U.S. participants who have a salient independent self. Although living in a collectivist culture does not necessarily make the person interdependent, consistent with past research (Maas et al., 2019; Markus & Kitayama, 2010), our results indicate that Indians have more interdependent self-construal compared with Americans. We believe that our results also shed further light on the previous findings, which reported that studying abroad exaggerates the degree of FoMO (Hetz et al., 2015). Based on the results of the present research, we argue that whether the person has a salient interdependent self would be a boundary condition of the relationships reported in these past findings. In particular, we expect that people with a salient interdependent self-construal will experience a higher degree of FoMO when they move abroad to study.

Third, this article also has the potential to identify a boundary condition of the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO, which was found to be positive (Beyens et al., 2016). People intrinsically desire to belong to a social group or community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, the degree of this desire varies and depends on the construal of the self (Chang, 2015). Thus, we posit that self-construal would moderate the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO. In particular, we expect that the relationship between the need to belong and FoMO would be stronger among people with a salient interdependent self-construal.

Last and foremost, the current article offers insights into a growing body of research in cross-cultural psychology based on self-construal that have compared various constructs cross-culturally. For instance, Hong and Chang (2015) found that people with interdependent self-construal are more likely to rely on their feelings rather than logic when they make decisions. The current research identified FoMO as a particular feeling that plays a pivotal role in the decision-making processes of people with interdependent self-construal. In addition, although in a recent research by Jonason et al. (2017) interdependent self-construal was not found to be linked to dark traits (e.g., Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy), our study supports a positive link between interdependent self-construal and FoMO, which could be conceptualized as a dark trait due to its negative psychological consequences (Riordan et al., 2015). In addition, past research on Dutch individuals has found that interdependent self-construal is negatively associated with self-awareness (Maas et al., 2019). This research has the potential to offer a reason for this negative relationship. Literally, people with a salient interdependent self may frequently experience the FoMO; therefore, they might not adequately focus on their own daily life experiences, which shape their sense of self, due to their inner desire to track others' daily experiences. Moreover, because people with a salient interdependent self-construal evaluate their life satisfaction through the degree of social appraisal based on their harmony with others (Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008), the FoMO could be somewhat similar to an inner control mechanism for individuals with a salient interdependence that provides checks and balance ability against the decline in the life satisfaction. Finally, a growing body of research has examined the life satisfaction of people cross-culturally (Park & Huebner, 2005; Suh et al., 1998). When comparing the life satisfaction level of individuals in individualistic and collectivistic cultures, researchers should consider the FoMO. People from collectivistic cultures, who are more inclined to develop interdependent self, may report a lower life satisfaction compared with people from individualistic cultures, who are less inclined to develop interdependent self, due to their vulnerability to the FoMO experience, which possibly decreases life satisfaction (Przybylski et al., 2013; Riordan et al., 2015). That is to say, the present research offers a promising explanation for the cross-cultural nature of the life satisfaction from the FoMO perspective.

In sum, the way people construe their selves affects the FoMO. When individuals emphasize connectedness and construe their selves as interdependent, the FoMO will be more salient. Thus, we suggest that people should focus on autonomy to refrain from experiencing the FoMO. In doing so, they will be protected from the negative outcomes of the FoMO.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

The present research is subject to some limitations. Across two studies, we operationalized the FoMO based on scale items. However, measuring the FoMO by observing participants' behaviors would be better in terms of ecological validity. That is to say, future research should measure the FoMO using a behavioral approach. In addition, we focused on exposing the link between self-construal and the FoMO without proposing a mediator or moderator variable in this relationship. Because the FoMO could be experienced despite believing that one made the best available choice at the moment (Milyavskaya et al., 2018), future research should examine the moderating role of maximization (Schwartz et al., 2002) in the relationship between self-construal and the

FoMO. This article also does not answer the question of whether the FoMO depends on people's actions. It is evident that actions might be self-centered or other-centered. Self-centered actions are motivated by self-interests, whereas other-centered actions are motivated by the needs, wants, and desires of other people (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006). Examples of the former include playing golf due to self-interest or having a massage to relax while examples of the latter include involving a donation campaign or giving a free lecture. Because self-centered actions prime an independent self-construal and other-centered actions prime an interdependent self-construal (Moses et al., 2018), future research should examine whether the latter increases the probability of experiencing the FoMO. In doing so, such research could reveal further motives for altruistic actions.

In addition, how and when the relationship between self-construal and the FoMO occurs should be examined in future research. For instance, the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) can be evaluated as a mediator variable in this relationship. The underlying logic would be that interdependent self-construal increases the need to belong, which in turn leads to the FoMO. Furthermore, in light of previous findings (Blackwell, Leaman, Trampusch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017), which have indicated that FoMO is positively associated with anxiety, anxiety can also be examined as a possible moderator of the relationship between the self-construal and the FoMO.

## Conclusion

Overall, our findings illustrate that people with interdependent self-construal are more inclined to experience FoMO compared with people with independent self-construal because they develop a self-concept in which others play an important role. We also demonstrate that the participants primed to temporarily have an interdependent self-construal had a higher degree of FoMO compared with the participants who were not primed. Based on the self-construal theory, we propose that the FoMO stems from wondering about what others are doing, which is prevalently observed among people with interdependent self-construal.

## Appendix

### *Interdependent Self-Construal Manipulation*

*We go to the city often. Our anticipation fills us as we see the skyscrapers come into view. We allow ourselves to explore every corner, never letting an attraction escape us. Our voice fills the air and street. We see all the sights, we window shop, and everywhere we go we see our reflection looking back at us in the glass of a hundred windows. At nightfall we linger, our time in the city almost over. When finally we must leave, we do so knowing that we will soon return. The city belongs to us.*


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