

Fear fuels workplace motivation: Exploring workplace fear of missing out and masculinity contest culture in India

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Abstract : The concept of Workplace FoMO is relatively new in the domain of psychological research. Defined and investigated in the western context for the first time in 2019, there is no existing literature on the construct in the Indian context, a country with one of the largest demographic dividends. The present study aimed to explore workplace FoMO and its relationship to workplace motivation as mediated by the masculinity contest culture, and further investigated gender-related differences that lie therein. Data was collected from 98 working employees (64 males, 34 females) on the three variables through the Workplace FoMO scale, Multidimensional work motivation scale and masculinity contest culture scale. The data was analysed using correlation, independent sample t-tests, regression and mediation analysis. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between workplace FoMO and workplace motivation. Furthermore, workplace motivation was predicted by workplace FoMO and Masculinity Contest Culture and a partial mediation was found. However, no gender differences were reported in the experience of Workplace FoMO and Workplace motivation. The results of the present study, being the first of its kind in the Indian context, can be leveraged to enhance employee motivation and alter management practices to utilise FoMO as a constructive solution rather than an abrasive element within an organisation.

Keywords: Workplace FoMO, workplace motivation, masculinity contest culture, gender differences, employee performance

India, a country that worships multiple Goddesses for prosperity, happiness and love, brings its own paradox to life, as it ranks 135 out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2022). Such inequality in India arises from the social construct of unequal power in a relationship. Consequently, there is a clear norm of male dominance and female subjugation in various areas of life, including the workplace (Esteve-Volart, 2004). Even though women have historically been working in various domains, their contribution is often disregarded or disguised as their 'responsibility as a good woman' who must cook, clean and take care of the family. Gender disparity in employment implies treating women (or men) differently because of characteristics that are not related to their merit or the requirements of the job (Kaushik et al., 2014). As per a report published by Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights in Bulgaria (1999), women are hired for low-paying, stagnant jobs that are referred to as "Traditional" women's jobs with fewer opportunities for advancement (Michael, 2007).

Since culturally learnt expectations are reinforced and influenced by the surrounding social structure that invalidates and undermines women's attempts to be effective, influential, and powerful, a woman leader stimulates a different reaction than a male leader. Researchers (e.g., Badura et al., 2018) have long discovered that when people think "leader," they tend to think "male," and that this finding cuts across many cultural boundaries. These findings are reproduced in professional settings too. According to a Deloitte Global report, in India, just 17.1% of board positions were held by women in 2021.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

Often, the work done by women is overlooked and goes unrecognised which demonstrates the implications of the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory postulates that individuals are motivated to grow when their innate psychological needs of connection, competence and autonomy are fulfilled. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), a relatively

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newer psychological phenomenon, has been conceptualized in terms of STD by Przybylski et al. (2013) as a “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent”. It may lead the individual to feel a deeper sense of social inferiority, loneliness, or intense rage. The fulfilment of this social acceptance desire leads to enhanced feelings of meaning (Lambert et al., 2013), positive emotional experiences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and life satisfaction (Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). Alternatively, thwarting the need to belong leads to stress and negative affect (Beekman et al., 2016).

Marsh et al. (2022) suggest that FoMO is a significant maladaptive aspect of technology. With the increased use of social media and other digital tools post-pandemic, the work-life orientation has experienced a significant shift and established a culture of work from home. With this vast virtual space, FoMO can also be applied to employee worries and behaviours (Farivar & Richardson, 2021).

Workplace FoMO

When applied to the workplace, Budnick et al. (2020) define workplace FoMO as “a pervasive apprehension that, relative to other employees, one might miss valuable career opportunities when away or disconnected from work.” It is manifested as the fear of missing opportunities for rewarding experiences like building professional relationships, gaining valuable information, and contributing to key organizational decisions and projects.

This recent phenomenon, FoMO at the workplace has been explored by a limited number of studies. Research conducted by Hoşgör et al. (2021) found that higher levels of FoMO were positively associated with higher levels of perceived work overload among nurses. Additionally, higher FoMO levels are negatively associated with lower levels of overall information security awareness at the workplace (Hadlington et al., 2020). This construct becomes a double-edged sword for working mothers. The findings of a study by Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis (2021) give insight into mothers' ‘double-sided FoMO’ of important work opportunities and significant events in their children's lives, which in turn raises anxiety and

frustration, ‘experienced as personal rather than as situational’.

Workplace Motivation and Gender Gap

Not only does gender disparity in the workplace influence workplace FoMO, but it has also been demonstrated to impact work motivation among employees. Pinder (1998) defined work motivation as “a set of energetic forces that originates both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behaviour, and to determine its form, direction, intensity and duration”. A direct relationship between higher levels of job motivation and improved organizational performance has been found (Grant, 2008; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). Irrespective of the sexual identity of the person, both men and women seek positions and jobs with development and training opportunities that would thereby allow them to advance to greater levels (Maxwell & Broadbridge, 2017).

Ayub and Rafif (2011) found a significant gender difference in work motivation. Multiple studies have shown that discriminatory treatment of women at the workplace leads to reduced positive psychological constructs. Female employees expect equal treatment from the organisation, and when that expectation is not met, job motivation and satisfaction suffer (Brief & Barsky, 2000; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2006). Memon and Jena (2017) found reduced motivational levels in women who experienced gender inequality at their workplace in India. Equally skilled at their job, female employees want to contribute and have their presence felt in the organisation like the male employees, the lack of which leads to negative impacts. Etzkowitz and Ranga (2011) suggested that, when their skills are being utilised, women in STEM fields feel fulfilled; otherwise, they lose motivation, and may even contemplate leaving their jobs. Additionally, women value a welcoming setting and are usually concerned with prestige, challenge, job security, task importance, cooperative environments, and their working conditions, while men are concerned predominantly with earnings, responsibilities, and promotions (Hofstede, 2001). Some studies demonstrate negligible gender differences in workplace motivation (Dubinsky et al., 1993; Deci & Ryan, 2014). In line with these findings, Pearson and Chatterjee (2002) found gender

uniformity in job motivation where men and women shared similar attitudes to development opportunities, relationships with managers, high earnings, skill usage, work autonomy, appealing living areas, etc.

Masculinity in the Workplace

Gender attributes are known to influence the larger context of the organisation itself. Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) was introduced by Berdahl et al. (2018) to describe a dysfunctional organizational culture in which stereotypically masculine characteristics are honoured. It has four dimensions- (1) Show no weakness (avoiding display of vulnerability, denying any mistakes), (2) Strength and stamina (valuing physical strength, working for extreme hours), and (3) Put work first (prioritising work over other obligations, where taking breaks is viewed a sign of non-commitment), and (4) Dog-Eat-Dog (hypercompetitive environment with lack of trust in anyone). Both men and women are required to demonstrate their "manhood" in workplaces, to be awarded with rewards and positions of power. However, mostly, all is not well if you choose to embrace 'femininity' as those who don't live up to the severe expectations are likely to suffer the consequences in the form of abuse, social rejection, and ridicule. This is a double-edged sword because women and men from oppressed groups may be ridiculed for acting in a domineering manner that is deemed "masculine" and hence only appropriate for upper-class men (Livingston & Pearce, 2009; Rudman et al., 2012).

MCC is associated with a number of negative outcomes, including stress, work/life conflict, intent to job search, greater burnout and turnover intentions, and lesser organizational dedication, harassment and poorer psychological well-being (Matos et al., 2018; Glick et al., 2018; Workman-Stark, 2020). Koc et al. (2021) reported that the impact of MCC on organizational outcomes did not differ between men and women. According to Glick et al. (2018), masculinity contest workplaces were experienced as hostile, socially negative, unsatisfying, and personally detrimental by both men and women.

In an attempt to explore these further, the present

study aimed to explore the relationship between Workplace FoMO and Motivation and investigate if there exist any gender differences among professionals in the Indian context with the following hypotheses

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses about workplace FoMO, Workplace motivation and masculinity contest culture at the workplace were tested in light of the existing literature.

1. Workplace FoMO and workplace motivation will be positively and significantly related.
2. There will be a significant relationship between workplace FoMO and masculinity contest culture at workplace.
3. There will be a significant relationship between workplace motivation and masculinity contest culture.
4. There will be significant difference in the workplace motivation of men and women.
5. There will be significant difference in the workplace FoMO of men and women.
6. Workplace FoMO and masculinity at workplace will be statistically significantly related with workplace motivation.
7. Masculinity at workplace will mediate the relationship between workplace FoMO and Workplace motivation.

Method

Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach to study the relationship between the specified variables and report any observed differences between the two gender groups involved in the sample. Data was collected using an online one-shot survey from May 2022 to August 2022 using non probability sampling techniques. The survey included standardised questionnaires for measuring workplace motivation, workplace FoMO and Masculinity context culture. The obtained data was subjected to inferential statistical techniques of

correlation, regression, t-test and mediation analysis.

Sample

The two main inclusion criteria for the sample were that the respondent must fall in the age group of 25- 40 years and must have been employed for more than 2 years. The participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. A total of 105 responses were collected. 7 responses were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The final sample of the study included 98 working employees (65.31% males and 34.69% females) from different areas of industries

including IT, manufacturing, banking, consulting and medical in the Indian workplace setting. The average age of employees was 30.14 years (SD = 4.53) who worked an average of 46 hours (SD= 12.35) per week with an average current job tenure of 2.56 years. Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to establish that the data formed a normal distribution. Since the CalcW (Shapiro-Wilk test statistic) was greater than 0.05 the data was normally distributed and fit for further analyses (King & Eckersley, 2019) (Refer to Table 1)

Table 1

Measures

Tests of Normality (Shapiro Wilk – CalcW)

Variables	Gender	p-value
Workplace FoMO	Male	0.111
	Female	0.563
Workplace Motivation Male		0.173
	Female	0.952

Note: Normally distributed at $p > 0.05$

Multi-Dimensional Work Motivation Scale Developed by Gagné et al. (2013), MWMS is based on the self-determination theory. It has 19 items spread across the five dimensions of amotivation, extrinsic regulation (social and material), identified regulation, and introjected regulation. The stem for the scale is “*why do you or would you put efforts into your current job.*” The responses are scored on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = “not at all” to 7= “completely”. This measure has a strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$) and decent convergent and discriminant validity with Cronbach’s $\alpha > 0.80$ (Gagne et al., 2014).

Masculinity Contest Culture scale Developed by Glick et al. (2018), this assesses workplace culture in terms of masculinity contest norms of showing no weakness, strengths and stamina, putting work first and dog-eat-dog. It is originally a 20-item scale, but for the purposes of this study, the shortened version of the scale (8 items) was utilised. The stem for the scale is “In my

work environment”. The responses are scored a 5-point Likert scale with 1 for (not at all true for my work environment) to 5 (entirely true of my work environment). The established reliability of the scale is 0.90 (Koc et al., 2021)

Workplace Fear of Missing Out scale Developed by Budnick et al. (2020), this scale measures workplace FoMO along the two dimensions of information exclusion and relational exclusion. It is a 10-item scale with a stem “When I am absent or disconnected from work...”. The responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. The reliability of the scale is satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.80$) (Budnick et al., 2021).

Procedure

The period of data collection was from May 2022 to August 2022. An online questionnaire was circulated among the working population according to the

criteria mentioned above in the Indian workplace setting. The Google form contained an introduction page, informed consent form, basic demographic information and the three standardised instruments – Workplace Motivation Scale, Masculinity contest culture scale and workplace FoMO scale. Each scale was scored by the researchers as per the guidelines provided by the test constructors. Inferential statistical techniques were utilised on SPSS version 26.0. Ninety eight responses were included in the analysis.

Results

A range of inferential statistical techniques were used to analyse the results. These are discussed below.

Table 2

Correlational analysis of WFoMO, WM and MCC (N = 98)

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Workplace Motivation	98	69.897	17.204	-		
2. Workplace FoMO	98	30.479	9.157	.318**	-	
3. Masculinity contest culture	98	19.112	7.4817	-.0504	-.1135	-

Note:

****Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$**

0.715 at $\alpha = 0.05$). Additionally, no significant differences in the experience of workplace FoMO between men and women employees were reported ($t = -1.264$, $p = 0.210$ at $\alpha = 0.05$)

Table 3

Comparison of WFoMO and WM between men and women employees

	Mean (SD)		t-value	p-value
	Men	Women		
Workplace FoMO	29.656 (9.443)	32.029 (8.512)	-1.264	0.210
Workplace Motivation	70.328 (18.679)	69.088 (14.245)	0.367	0.715

Table 2 revealed that workplace motivation and workplace FoMO are positively and significantly correlated at $\alpha = 0.01$ with $r = 0.318$. Using Cohen's conventions (1988), a correlation coefficient of 0.318 is considered a moderate correlation. Furthermore, the correlation between workplace motivation and Masculinity contest culture (MCC) at workplace and workplace FoMO and MCC were found insignificant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 shows the results of the independent sample t-test to compare the experience of workplace FoMO and Workplace motivation separately among men and women employees. Results revealed no significant differences in levels of workplace motivation between men and women ($t = 0.367$, $p =$

Multiple regression analysis (Table 4) was run to predict workplace motivation from masculinity contest culture and workplace FoMO. These variables statistically significantly predicted workplace motivation, $F(2, 95) = 11.648$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.197$. Both variables, workplace

FoMO and masculinity contest culture, predicted workplace motivation for employees in the Indian workplace setting.

A mediation analysis using PROCESS macro was conducted to assess the mediating role of masculinity contest culture (Mas) on the linkage between workplace FoMO (WFOMO) and Workplace motivation (WM). The results (see Table 5) revealed

Table 4

Multiple linear regression analysis

Variables	B	Beta	t-value	p-value
Constant	43.940		7.374	<0.001*
Workplace FoMO	.373	.198	2.015	0.047*
Masculinity contest Culture	.764	.332	3.371	0.001
	R= .444	R ² = .197	F= 11.648	p<0.001

Dependent variable: Workplace Motivation

that the total effect of workplace FoMO on workplace motivation was significant (Beta = 0.5967, $t = 3.2817$, $p = 0.0014$) at $p < 0.05$. With the inclusion of masculinity contest culture (Mas), the impact of workplace FoMO on workplace motivation is significant as well (Beta = 0.3728, $t = 2.0147$, $p = 0.0468$) at $p < 0.05$. The indirect effect of workplace FoMO on workplace motivation through masculinity contest culture was found significant with an effect size of 0.2238 at $p < 0.05$. Since, both the direct and indirect effects are significant, partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986)

between the variables can be established, also called complementary mediation (Zhao et al., 2010)

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore workplace FoMO and its relationship to workplace motivation as mediated by the masculinity contest culture, and further investigated gender-related differences that lie therein. Applying multiple inferential statistics techniques, the findings revealed a significant positive correlation

Table 5

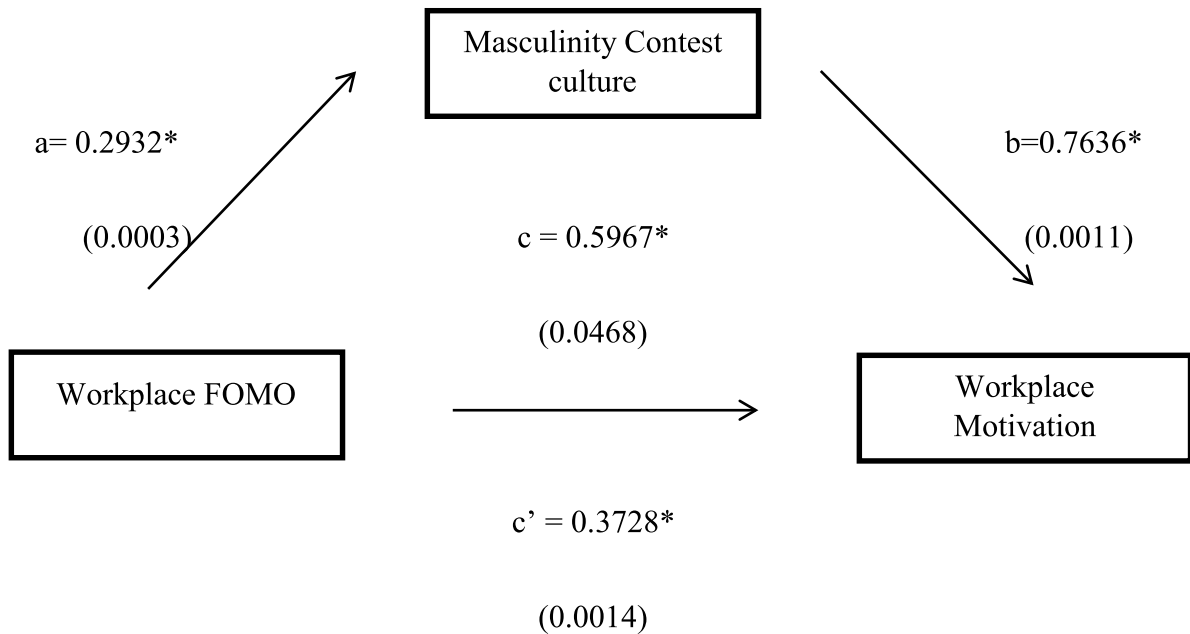
Mediation Analysis for Workplace FoMO and Workplace motivation through Masculinity contest culture

	Coefficient	SE	t-value	p-value
Path A	0.2932	0.0778	3.7666	0.0003
Path B	0.7636	0.2265	3.3710	0.0011
Path C' (Direct effect)	0.3728	0.1851	2.0147	0.0468
Path C (Total effect)	0.5967	0.1818	3.2817	0.0014

Note: Results significant at $p < 0.05$

Figure 1

Mediation Analysis model for Workplace FOMO and Workplace Motivation through Masculinity contest Culture.



Note: Results significant at $p < 0.05$

between workplace motivation and workplace FoMO. It implies that when an employee is afraid to miss out on work opportunities, their motivation to work proactively increases to bridge that gap. This result is in line with the hypothesis and previous literature that suggest that an increase in the workplace FoMO would subsequently increase the employee's motivation to work. Similarly, Budnick et al. (2020) found that higher levels of workplace FoMO predicted higher reports of work burnout and message-checking behaviours to remain informed (i.e., reduce information exclusion apprehensions). Moreover, it has also been proven that employees try to reduce informational exclusion, which is a component of workplace FoMO, by learning more, to compensate for the time when one is not present. Hence, the fear of informational exclusion leads to higher motivation which is in line with the present

hypothesis (Reinders, 2022). The influence of age and tenure of the employees on workplace motivation has been investigated in previous research. The present sample is relatively young (mean age = 30 years) and Akkermans and Tims (2017) found that younger employees were more likely to engage in proactive behaviours, such as seeking out new challenges and opportunities for growth in the workplace which may be related with the motivational aspect of workplace FoMO. Furthermore, the tenure of employees in their present organisation affects their engagement. A Forbes article published in 2019 highlighted that up until two years of tenure, employees tend to be most engaged, which may be a possible explanation for the positive correlation between WFoMO and WM since the average tenure of the present sample is

2.56 years.

Further, through regression analysis, masculinity at the workplace was found to be significantly related with workplace motivation. Extrinsic motivation originates from an individual's physical environment; money and verbal rewards that are mediated outside of a person are examples of extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972). Because MCC at work value competition and individual performance, it is possible that they will drive extrinsic motivation. However, Eskildsen et al. (2010) found that the less masculine a society is, the greater is the score on everyday work and motivation. Similarly, Maswadeh and Zumot (2021) reported that a humanistic approach to discipline influences work motivation by acknowledging every member of the organisation as an average person with flaws, shortcomings, and mistakes. This contrasts with an MCC, where displaying vulnerability and acknowledging mistakes is strongly discouraged.

The results also revealed no significant differences in levels of workplace motivation between men and women. This could indicate the progressive and explicit gender diversity policies that companies have introduced as a part of their organisational culture which enhanced focus to create more equitable spaces. Previous literature suggests that women employees experience a drop in the levels of their job satisfaction and job motivation when they do not receive equitable treatment from their company (Kannan, 2005; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2006). Hence, the lack of differential levels of job motivation may suggest the more equitable practices that companies are adopting nowadays. This can be observed in the gender workforce parity between multiple companies in India like Info Edge (41% women employees), PepsiCo (40% Women Managers), Zomato (50% Women Directors), TCS (44% women managers) and so on. Other studies also offer support for the findings of the present research and demonstrate negligible gender differences in workplace motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2014). For instance, Pearson and Chatterjee (2002) found gender uniformity in job motivation where men and women shared the same attitudes to development opportunities, work autonomy, high earnings, skill usage, appealing living areas, relationships with managers, etc.

Additionally, no significant differences in the experience of workplace FoMO between men and women employees were reported. Previous researches attempting to determine the impact of gender on the construct of

workplace FoMO have not reported significant differences suggesting that workplace FoMO may be experienced by anyone who works for an organisation, irrespective of their gender (McKee et al., 2022). It is interesting to note, high scores were observed on the workplace FoMO scale for both men and women employees. This consistency of scores across both genders may be reasoned by the connection between FoMO and the human need for social connection and engagement as social animals. Since socialising with co-workers is a daily activity, it is possible for anyone, regardless of gender, to feel as though they are missing out on something significant when they are not doing so.

Finally, the findings also revealed that masculinity at the workplace mediated the relationship between workplace FoMO and workplace motivation. This suggests that the masculinity contest culture (MCC) is often displayed by male and female employees alike in an organisational setting as it is conventionally the trademark of a good and driven employee. This behaviour, in turn, enhances workplace motivation and workplace FoMO by creating a culture which propagates and promotes competitiveness and dominance. The sense of urgency and hustle culture created by such an environment can be instrumental in providing opportunities of professional engagement that make it more likely for employees to experience FoMO and thereby increase their workplace motivation to 'compete' amongst themselves. This stands in contrast to the previous literature which states that as MCC does not foster a positive social identification with one's organisation, it leads to a reduction in employee motivation levels (Koc et al., 2021).

Limitations

Since an English medium survey was used for data collection, social desirability associated with self-report measures can be considered a key constraint while also introducing a language barrier for employees who don't have adequate grasp over the language. Additionally, the sample size of the study was less than 100, and the sampling technique used for data collection was non-probability. These

factors affect the representativeness of the sample and reduce the generalizability of the findings. A limitation on demographic information was also noted. The participants did not specify the type of company they work for, for instance a fortune 500 or start-up. This could have some influence on the workplace motivation of the employees. Lastly, in order to enhance the methodological rigor in the future, checking assumptions related with multiple regression may be useful apart from just determining the normality.

Future directions and implications

The research in the direction of Workplace FoMO can be furthered by looking into sector specific factors or undertaking comparisons like public vs. private sectors, Physical Workplace vs. Hybrid cultures organisation that might motivate employees to work better due to FoMO. The impact of age and tenure of the employees on the experience of WFoMO and Workplace Motivation can also be investigated. Additionally, while motivation is one side of the coin, it can be useful to investigate the health-related costs of experience workplace FoMO like stress, anxiety, burnout and physical health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease and immune dysfunction. Research could examine the cost implications for employers, such as increased healthcare utilization and absenteeism, as well as potential interventions to mitigate the negative effects of workplace FoMO on employee health and productivity. Furthermore, individual differences can be explored using self-esteem that may give a fuller picture of cost-benefit analysis of leveraging FoMO in the workplace. Future studies can also focus on including more variables like leadership styles, impact of hybrid culture and organisational citizenship behaviour to further the infant concept of workplace FoMO in psychological research. In order to enrich findings, data can be collected both qualitatively and quantitatively in the future to report subjective experiences of employees and longitudinal studies on WFoMO may be done to determine causality. Lastly, it may be beneficial for the generalisation of results in the Indian context to ascertain the reliability of the scales used. The results of the present study, if utilised appropriately, can have considerable implications for the organisational practices. It may be leveraged to

enhance employee motivation and alter management practices to utilise FoMO as a constructive solution rather than an abrasive element. For instance, a manager can strive to strike the delicate balance of paying just enough attention to and including the employees to make them feel engaged but also limiting the communication in the workplace enough to inspire curiosity. Other social incentives may be formulated along similar lines to employ workplace FoMO as an asset for desired outcomes.

Conclusion

The present study attempts to add to the limited literature on workplace FoMO in the Indian workplace context while also establishing a partial meditational relationship between workplace FoMO and motivation through Masculinity contest culture. Considering how this construct is in its infancy in the domain of psychological research, it provides further impetus to investigate the same in greater depth and establish its relationship with other organisation – related variables as well.

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