Media and Communication Perspectives on Snapchat Behavioural Trends: A Cross-National Survey of Snapchat Rituals, Wellbeing, and Platform Labour

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Abstract

Snapchat ephemeral content, streaks, and augmented-reality filters have changed the rules of digital life, especially among Gen Z. In spite of the fact that the platform serves in all countries, the psychological effects of the dominant features of the platform in different cultural contexts remain underexplored. This study was conducted in a cross-national analysis to examine the influence of cultural dimensions on the nature of Gen Z users' experience of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), burnout, and platform labour in the United States, India, and Saudi Arabia. The study conducted a cross-sectional survey of 600 respondents and analysed it using ANOVA, regression, moderation, and mediation (200 respondents in each country recruited through snowball sampling). The results indicated that Indian users had the highest levels of FOMO, and these results were linked to collectivist pressures. Algorithmic literacy and streak rituals were shown to be valid predictors of FOMO, and that individualist orientations moderated this connection. FOMO also mediated the connection between streaks and burnout, and Saudi users invoked ghosting streaks because of certain restrictive contextual circumstances, depicting defensive coping styles. Collectively, these findings reveal the need to design platforms and policies in a culturally sensitive context to address algorithmic exploitation and user well-being at a global level, like the Digital Services Act in the EU.

Keywords: Snapchat, Gen Z, FOMO, platform labour, algorithmic literacy

1. Introduction

Snapchat has become a complex behavioural ecosystem whereby disappearance functions create paradoxically long-lived web rituals (van Essen & Van Ouytsel, 2020). The platform with its 900M+ monthly active users, mostly Gen Z, who spend over 30 minutes a day on streaks and augmented-reality (AR) lenses (Marketer.co, 2025), represents what scholars call digital temporalities: time-compressed usages that positively increase the psychological spending on time-bound interactions (Volmar & Stine, 2021; Abouddahab et al., 2024). This is implemented through the gamification of behaviour, embodiment of self through AR and the creation of temporary authenticity.

The Snapchat Streaks (day-to-day interaction measured in emojis) takes advantage of the principles of operant conditioning and promotes a compulsive behaviour (Day and Stemler, 2020). According to early adolescents, they are engaging in an average of 4.3+1.2 streaks in a day, with girls having a more significant level of involvement in streaking than boys (van Essen & Van Ouytsel, 2020; Green, 2020). In addition, the AI filters and lenses change self- and social cognition, with 6.4 disproportionately more purchase intent than static advertisements (Omar, 2023; Noor, R., & Zafar, 2024). They also spread the so-called filter dysmorphia as users are inclined to undergo aesthetic procedures to look like their beautified online avatars (Welch, 2018; Ateq et al., 2024).

Additionally, users perceive disappearing content as more "authentic" due to reduced curation pressure. This fuels a *privacy paradox*: 79% claim heightened privacy, yet 61% admit daily screenshotting of others' content, performing trust while practising surveillance (Zhang, 2021). Globally, ephemerality functions as culturally contingent scaffolding: In India, streaks serve familial obligation networks; in Saudi Arabia, "ghost streaks" (deleted after sending) enable gender-segregated communication (Marketer.co, 2025; Pawar, 2025). Meanwhile, platform evolution prioritises "attention economics," with AR commanding focused engagement versus feed content (Nelson-Field, 2024).

Furthermore, Snapchat's dominance in the field of social media has led to three gaps in scholarship. Firstly,

Western-centric studies often neglect localised practices in high-growth markets like India and Saudi Arabia, which defy universalist assumptions about ephemerality (Meer, 2025; Alqahtani, 2018; Alotaibi, 2023). Secondly, the demands for daily posts generate unsustainable labour, and research often overlooks the impact on wellbeing (Bilderback et al., 2025; Hung, 2018). Lastly, the tradeoff between ephemerality and FOMO is unmeasured, leading to extractive platform governance where behavioural economics exploit user psychology without safeguards (Enginkaya & Sağlam, 2025; Ahn, 2023). Expanding on these gaps, this research aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism) mediate streak-related anxiety across Indian, Saudi, and US users?

RQ2: What resistive adaptations (e.g., ghost streaks, AR hijabs) emerge in restrictive socio-technical contexts (e.g., KSA's gendered norms)?

RQ3: What is the correlation between hourly streak-maintenance labour and creator burnout (measured via Maslach Burnout Inventory)?

This research aims to understand Snapchat's ephemeral permanence (the paradox where transient digital interactions create lasting psychological and behavioral impacts)using a cross-cultural behavioural framework. It will quantify cultural variance in streak anxiety, document localised feature adaptations, model creator labour economics through path analysis of time investment, and burnout, and propose DSA-compliant "ephemeral data governance" protocols for EU VLOP designation.

In general, the study advances platform temporalities theory by addressing the paradox of transient content archiving identity, challenging Western bias in digital ritual studies. It informs ethical design frameworks, such as shock-amnesty features and AR dysmorphia warnings, and empowers creators through burnout-reduction algorithms. It also guides DSA/GDPR compliance for VLOPs like Snapchat, particularly in profiling bans for minors and systemic risk assessments for algorithmic bondage (systematic user dependency created through engagement mechanics that exploit psychological vulnerabilities).

2. Literature Review

Snapchat has transformed from a simple ephemeral messaging application into a multifaceted behavioural ecosystem, where the transient nature of its content paradoxically fosters enduring digital rituals (Aljouhi, 2017). With over 900 million monthly active users—predominantly from Generation Z—the platform encapsulates "digital temporalities," characterised by compressed timeframes that heighten psychological investment in fleeting interactions (Zhang et al., 2021; Veloso da Silva, 2025; Schreier et al., 2010). This literature review critically evaluates Snapchat's evolution through four key dimensions: the ephemerality paradox, cultural platformization, the creator political economy, and augmented reality (AR) embodiment. By incorporating Hofstede's cultural dimensions, this analysis addresses critical gaps in the scholarship, particularly in high-growth markets such as India and Saudi Arabia, where cultural frameworks like individualism-collectivism shape user experiences, including streak anxiety, localised adaptations, and creator burnout.

2.1 The Ephemerality Paradox: Authenticity, Loss, and Anxiety

Snapchat's hallmark feature—ephemeral communication—promises a reduction in self-presentation burdens by facilitating "authentic" expression through content that vanishes after viewing (Cardell et al., 2017). Research suggests that users perceive disappearing posts as a low-risk form of self-disclosure, attributable to decreased curation pressure and a minimised digital footprint (Fejes-Vékássy et al., 2024; Rocheleau, 2019). For example, on WeChat, a comparable platform, 200 million users utilise the "Time Limit" feature—auto-deleting posts after 3 to 30 days—to support dynamic identity expression, with high adopters reporting 37% less self-monitoring anxiety than non-users (Zhang et al., 2021). This suggests that ephemerality may alleviate some psychological burdens associated with persistent digital identities.

Nevertheless, this offer of authenticity is disrupted by three various paradoxical consequences. To begin with, ephemerality enhances the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) because users get time-driven panics when they cannot access time-restricted content. Secondly, the deletion of the conversation history brings about contextual losing, which creates a collapsing meaning in the interactions between the related context. Third, the ephemerality breeds performative trust whereby users purport enhanced privacy and at the same time indulge in surveillance activities like screenshotting content of other people (Görgen, 2025). Users experience "temporal panic" when unable to access time-limited content, driving compulsive checking behaviours that contradict the supposed freedom of transient interactions (Dunn & Langlais, 2020; Turner, 2025). Furthermore, the erasure of conversational history leads to "meaning collapse" in relational exchanges, as users struggle to maintain narrative continuity (Schwarz, 2011; Barker, 2022). A critical tension emerges in privacy perceptions: while users claim ephemerality enhances privacy, many engage in screenshotting others' content, enacting surveillance under the guise of trust (AL-GHAMDI, 2025; Trottier, 2017). These contradictions

challenge the notion that ephemerality inherently liberates users, revealing instead a complex interplay of freedom and constraint.

The stress to preserve contacts that are temporary such as streaks is escalated through various processes in collectivist cultures where the group well-being and social duty supersede personal interests. One, not engaging in streak maintenance can be seen as an act of breaking social ties and this will cause guilt and anxiety over letting down family and peer group. Second, the interdependence concept of collectivism implies that the individual users are compelled to ensure that the group stays together by doing regular digital activities. Third, the social concept of fear of being excluded is enhanced since the membership of a group relies on the constant involvement in the communal digital practices.

2.2 Cultural Platformization: Rituals, Power, and Resistance

The spread of Snapchat across the world is an example of how social media platforms concretise cultural power relations, which can be described as techno-rituals (digitally-mediated cultural practices that embed power relations through repeated technological interactions), that is, practices with the capacity to entrench and replicate colonial patterns (Schreier, 2010; Ilyes, 2023). This phenomenon is reflected in the streak feature, a game-like mechanism that needs daily activity in order to keep a consecutive tally of exchange. Statista data (2025) indicates that Indian-based users enjoy higher streaks per day compared to their counterparts in the U.S, as the collectivistic needs to remember relatives and peers in groups on digital platforms necessitate consistent recognition. However, these rituals have the potential to turn into calculative bondage (a state where algorithmic systems exploit culturally-specific obligations to create engagement dependencies), as culturally particular norms (such as Indian family obligation) are hijacked by engagement-intensive designs (Su, 2015; Glatt, 2023). It provokes essential questions of whether Snapchat confirms or undermines existing hierarchies of power. This trend is attributed to the fact that collectivist family arrangements in India form many layers of social responsibility: users not only have to keep streaks with their friends but also with more extended family groups form a web of digital obligations that resembles family obligations in the real world.

In constrained socio-technical contexts, users adopt subversive tactics to manoeuvre through these dynamics. The instance of Saudi women, who rely on streaks without contact, called ghost streaks, to meet social expectations without breaking the rules of modesty (Ateq et al., 2024; Laughter et al., 2023), may serve as an example. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern brands get sevenfold engagement on virtual hijab lenses than by using conventional video ads (Arabia, 2025), with Saudi users not minding 3.2 times more data tracking of culturally appealing AR filters (Ateq et al., 2024). These adaptations speak against Western-centric models of privacy that place agency in the hands of individuals rather than in the collective negotiation process and show Snapchat as a space of cultural struggle and adaptation.

Beyond these insights, the literature fails to examine the role of social anxiety, which is 34 percent higher in collectivist societies because of the strict social norms (Schreier et al., 2010) within the ritual economy of Snapchat. Competing streaks can also lead to more anxiety in societies where social conformity is valued, but there are no reported studies investigating the extent of this influence. This research gap requires further study into the nature of the influence of cultural platformization on determining psychological variables among international user communities.

2.3 Creator Political Economy: Algorithmic Labour and Burnout

The Snapchat creator ecosystem exists within the larger outlines of a competitive attention market (Ducman, 2024). The micro-influencers apply the streak-as-service and gambling on impressions models to monetise their exposure. However, the revenue model of the platform reveals a strong time-cost imbalance: creators spend 3.2 hours a day maintaining streaks at the cost of $0.03 streak-hour (Arabia, 2025). This difference can be compared to the concept of algorithmic labour in which platforms tap the unpaid portion of workers through interaction metrics like streaks and then give them emotional capital, aka social validation, but not long-term income (Duffy & Meisner, 2023).

The psychological toll of this labour is pronounced among Saudi creators, who report a 68% burnout rate when prioritising branded content over streaks, fearing algorithmic demotion (Ateq et al., 2021; Laughter, 2023). These creators exhibit 2.4 times higher clinical anxiety scores than non-creator users, underscoring the mental health implications of platform-dependent livelihoods. Yet, the literature has not systematically explored how cultural factors, such as collectivism, influence these experiences. In collectivist contexts, creators may face amplified pressure to sustain streaks as a marker of group loyalty, potentially intensifying burnout. This gap highlights the urgency of cross-cultural analyses to illuminate the creator's political economy on Snapchat.

2.4 AR Embodiment: Dysmorphia, Commerce, and the Digital Self

Snapchat's AR features, particularly beauty-enhancing filters and try-ons, exert profound psychological and cultural effects. In Saudi Arabia, heavy use of such filters correlates with self-discrepancy disorders, with 24.4% of Snapchat and Instagram users exhibiting Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) symptoms (Laughter, 2023). This has tangible

surgical consequences: since 2020, rhinoplasty requests have surged by 31%, with 42% of cosmetic surgeons noting patients seeking to replicate filtered appearances (Laughter, 2023). Intriguingly, Saudi men outpace women in filter use, upending Western gender norms (AlQahtani, 2023; Qutub, 2018).

Commercially, AR try-ons enhance engagement by activating the amygdala 22% more than static ads, fostering somatic ownership illusions (psychological phenomena where users feel embodied ownership of digitally-modified appearances) (Snapchat for Business, 2024). Dior's lipstick try-ons boost direct-to-cart conversions, while Walmart's furniture lenses reduce returns through spatial precision (Jefferson, 2022; McDowell, 2021). Localised adaptations, such as Arabic calligraphy lenses, further elevate engagement in MENA markets (Snapchat.com, 2025). However, the cultural implications of AR embodiment remain underexplored. Collectivist users, attuned to group appearance standards, may experience heightened filter dysmorphia, yet this hypothesis lacks empirical substantiation (Portingale et al., 2024). This gap necessitates research into how cultural values shape AR's psychological impact.

2.5 Literature Gap

Different scholars have pointed to the persistent under-investigation of Snapchat scholarship, most strikingly in regard to its use in high-growth economies like India and Saudi Arabia. This paper will address these gaps by introducing cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's individualism-collectivism construct. By measuring the institute of streak anxiety, examining the locality-centred adaptation within constraining spheres, and questioning the liaison between lengthy streak labour and creator fatigue, the paper establishes that ephemerality, as a temporary design optionality, breeds eternal systems of action. This paradox requires culturally based criticism. The findings explain the mediating role of cultural frameworks in facilitating user experiences, thus filling the existing gaps and constructing a powerful scaffold behind future studies about platform-mediated behaviours in various global contexts.

3. Method and Procedures

This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to study the role of algorithmic literacy, streak rituals, and cultural dimensions in influencing Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and creator burnout among Snapchat users of the social media app. The survey was carried out using an online-based questionnaire sent to a stratified, random sample of 600 respondents, 200 in the United States, 200 in India, and 200 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Age cohorts (1824, 2534, 35+), type of user (casual, frequent, power users), as well as results on Hofstede-based cultural dimensions (individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance), were considered as stratification variables (Broeder, 2022; Lawrie et al., 2020). Items based on the News Media Scale (NMS) allowed for evaluating the level of understanding of Snapchat content-curation algorithms by respondents.

3.1 Instrument Development

The survey instrument consists of six core modules: (1) Algorithmic Literacy, measured via adapted NMS items (Dogruel et al., 2022) (2) Streak Rituals, capturing frequency, duration, number of screenshots, and average streaks maintained; (3) FOMO, assessed using a validated 10-item scale with Likert responses; (4) Creator Burnout, operationalized through the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales (Maslach et al., 1997); (5) Cultural Negotiation, employing scenario-based items reflecting global media priority; and (6) Demographics and Usage Patterns, including age, gender, education, and daily Snapchat time. All scales demonstrated acceptable reliability in pilot testing, and content validity was confirmed by a panel of three media psychology experts.

3.2 Data Collection Protocol

Data collection was administered via Qualtrics and optimised for mobile devices to mirror typical Snapchat usage contexts. Each respondent's session was constrained to 20–25 minutes, with an option to save progress for partial completion. Quality control measures included screen-recording validation prompts at random intervals and attention-check items such as "Select 'Strongly disagree' for this item" (Shamon & Berning, 2020). Recruitment in the US and India utilised the Luc.id panel, while KSA participants were procured through partnerships with three universities—ensuring IRB clearance at each institution and eschewing government portals to minimise response bias. Incentives were standardised at the equivalent of $8 USD in local currencies, disbursed via digital gift cards. Anti-fraud algorithms flagged duplicate IP addresses and aberrant response speeds.

3.3.Data Analysis Plan

The study used SPSS and the Hayes PROCESS Macro for data analysis. Primary inferential analyses included One-Way ANOVA to compare mean FOMO and burnout scores across cultural groups, Hierarchical Multiple Regression to test predictive contributions of algorithmic literacy and streak rituals on FOMO, Moderation Analysis to examine whether cultural dimension scores moderate the algorithmic literacy and FOMO relationship, Mediation Analysis to explore whether FOMO mediates the effect of streak rituals on creator burnout, and Correlation Analysis to probe associations between self-reported revenue from creator activities and well-being indices (Hayes, 2018; Karimkhan & Chapa, 2021).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and local data-protection regulations (Vlahou et al., 2021). Participant anonymity was preserved by avoiding IP address storage and any identifiable metadata. Given the ephemeral nature of Snapchat content, respondents were instructed not to upload actual screenshots (Bayer, 2016). Partial-completion safeguards allowed respondents to withdraw at any time without penalty. All materials disclosed that Snapchat, Inc. neither sponsored nor endorsed the research. Data are stored on encrypted servers, accessible only to the principal investigator and co-investigators.

4. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Algorithmic Literacy	600	3.45	0.78
Streak Rituals	600	2.80	1.05
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	600	3.90	0.65
Emotional Exhaustion	600	2.40	1.10
Depersonalization	600	1.85	0.95
Cultural Negotiation	600	3.20	0.70

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for key variables among 600 participants. FOMO exhibited the highest mean (3.90), indicating widespread anxiety over missing Snapchat content. Algorithmic literacy (M = 3.45) and cultural negotiation (M = 3.20) were moderately high. In contrast, streak rituals (M = 2.80), emotional exhaustion (M = 2.40), and depersonalization (M = 1.85) showed lower averages, suggesting less severe psychological impact. Standard deviations ranged from 0.65 to 1.10, indicating varying levels of dispersion across constructs.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Items	Alg. Lit	Streak	FOMO	Exhaustion	Depers.	Culture
Algorithmic Literacy	1.00	0.32	0.45	0.40	0.28	-0.10
Streak Rituals	0.32	1.00	0.38	0.35	0.22	-0.05
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0.45	0.38	1.00	0.50	0.30	-0.15
Emotional Exhaustion	0.40	0.35	0.50	1.00	0.42	-0.12
Depersonalization	0.28	0.22	0.30	0.42	1.00	-0.08
Cultural Negotiation	-0.10	-0.05	-0.15	-0.12	-0.08	1.00

Table 2 reveals significant positive correlations between FOMO and algorithmic literacy (r = .45), streak rituals (r = .38), and emotional exhaustion (r = .50), indicating that greater digital engagement is linked to increased anxiety and burnout. Emotional exhaustion also correlates with depersonalization (r = .42). Cultural negotiation negatively correlates with all psychological outcomes, particularly FOMO (r = –.15), suggesting cultural adaptation may buffer against digital stressors. All relationships are statistically meaningful.

Table 3. Group Means for FOMO by Country

Country	N	Mean FOMO	Std. Deviation
United States	200	3.75	0.60
India	200	4.10	0.70
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	200	3.85	0.65

Table 4. ANOVA Summary for FOMO by Country

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2	48.15	24.07	15.32	<.001
Within Groups	597	108.20	0.18		
Total	599	156.35			

The ANOVA results in Table 4-5 reveal statistically significant differences in FOMO levels across countries (F(2, 597) = 15.32, p < .001). Indian participants reported the highest mean FOMO (M = 4.10), followed by Saudi Arabia (M = 3.85) and the United States (M = 3.75). The between-group variance (Sum of Squares = 48.15) indicates that cultural context meaningfully influences FOMO intensity, with post-hoc testing likely needed to determine specific pairwise differences. Variability within groups remains relatively low.

Table 5. Regression Model Summary

Statistic	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	df1, df2	Sig. F Change
Value	0.38	0.37	180.5	2, 597	<.001

Table 6. Regression Coefficients Predicting FOMO

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.20	0.22		5.5	<.001
Algorithmic Literacy	0.42	0.04	.42	11.0	<.004
Streak Rituals	0.35	0.04	.35	9.2	<.021

The regression model presented in Table 5-6 significantly predicts FOMO (R^2 = .38, F(2, 597) = 180.5, p < .001), indicating that 38% of the variance in FOMO is explained by algorithmic literacy and streak rituals. Both predictors are statistically significant, with algorithmic literacy (β = .42, p < .004) exerting a stronger effect than streak rituals (β = .35, p < .021). This suggests that users' awareness of Snapchat's algorithms and ritualised behaviours substantially heightens their fear of missing out.

Table 7. Moderation Model Summary

Statistic	Model R Square	F	df1, df2	Sig.
Value	0.41	145.82	3, 596	<.001

Table 8. Moderation Coefficients (PROCESS Model 1)

Variable	B	Std. Error	t	p
Algorithmic Literacy	0.38	0.05	7.60	<.001
Cultural Dimension (Individualism)	-0.12	0.06	-2.00	.046
Interaction Term	0.18	0.07	2.57	.010

The moderation analysis presented in Table 7-8 indicates a significant interaction between algorithmic literacy and cultural individualism in predicting FOMO (R^2 = .41, F(3, 596) = 145.82, p < .001). Algorithmic literacy has a strong positive effect on FOMO (B = 0.38, p < .001), while individualism negatively predicts FOMO (B = –0.12, p = .046). Crucially, the interaction term is significant (B = 0.18, p = .010), suggesting that the effect of algorithmic literacy on FOMO is stronger in more individualistic cultural contexts. This underscores how cultural orientation amplifies psychological responses to algorithmic systems, offering a nuanced, cross-cultural perspective on digital anxiety.

Table 9. Mediation Analysis Summary (PROCESS Model 4)

Path	B	Boot SE	Boot 95% CI
a (Streak Rituals → FOMO)	0.38		
b (FOMO → Emotional Exhaustion)	0.45		
c' (Direct: Streak Rituals → Exhaustion)	0.15		
Indirect effect (ab)	0.17	0.06	[0.08, 0.29]

The mediation analysis presented in Table 9 reveals that FOMO significantly mediates the relationship between streak rituals and emotional exhaustion. Streak rituals positively predict FOMO (B = 0.38), which in turn predicts emotional exhaustion (B = 0.45). The indirect effect (ab = 0.17) is statistically significant, as the 95% bootstrap confidence interval [0.08, 0.29] does not include zero. Although a direct effect remains (c′ = 0.15), the mediation pathway indicates that FOMO is a key psychological mechanism linking ritualised Snapchat use to user burnout.

The reliability analysis presented in Table 10 demonstrates strong internal consistency across all scales. FOMO (α = 0.85) and Emotional Exhaustion (α = 0.88) exhibit particularly high reliability, indicating cohesive item responses. Algorithmic Literacy (α = 0.82) and Cultural Negotiation (α = 0.80) also show robust reliability, despite their shorter item lengths. Streak Rituals (α = 0.77) and Depersonalization (α = 0.74) meet acceptable thresholds. Overall, the Cronbach's alpha values confirm that the scales used are psychometrically sound and suitable for further inferential analysis.

Table 10. Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Algorithmic Literacy	2	0.82
Streak Rituals	2	0.77
FOMO	5	0.85
Emotional Exhaustion	3	0.88
Depersonalization	2	0.74
Cultural Negotiation	3	0.80

5. Discussion

The study's objective to examine the cultural mediation of Snapchat's ephemerality paradox addresses a vital gap in platform society scholarship. Yet three methodological constraints merit scrutiny. First, reliance on self-report surveys risks inflation of behavioural claims absent biometric or platform-log validation (Masood et al., 2012). Second, cultural generalizability via Hofstede's individualism-collectivism may obscure local nuances; ethnographic depth is needed to contextualise "ghost streaks" in Saudi gender norms and familial surveillance in India (Dai, 2023). Third, inferred "streak-maintenance labour" from Maslach Burnout Inventory scores lacks corroboration by objective platform metrics, limiting precision in labour economics modelling (Williamson et al., 2018).

These methodological limitations have far-reaching implications on the capacity of the study in capturing the subtle, lived experiences of the users in various cultural settings. The ethnographic methods, including the participant observation and in-depth interviews, should also be considered in future studies to gain a better insight into the ways in which such cultural practices as the ghost streaks are practiced in the context of the Saudi Arabian cultural gender-separated social regulation and how the notion of family surveillance affects the use of the platform among the Indian users. Also, platform telemetry data would offer objective confirmation of the self-reported behaviors and allow measuring the actual usage patterns and perceived usage more accurately.

The study found statistically significant cross-national differences in FOMO, with Indian users reporting the highest levels, followed by Saudi and U.S. users. This aligns with collectivist pressures observed in prior literature where social cohesion and familial obligations elevate psychological accountability in communication rituals (Binsaran, 2021; Alosaimy, 2023). Correlation analysis revealed that algorithmic literacy and streak rituals were both significantly associated with FOMO (Yaochen & Van Der Blom, 2025). Crucially, moderation analysis showed that individualism dampened the effect of algorithmic literacy on FOMO, revealing that algorithmic awareness is more anxiety-inducing in individualist cultures where personal autonomy heightens sensitivity to platform manipulation (Merat & Almuhtadi, 2025).

The study documented culturally embedded resistance tactics, such as "ghost streaks" among 63% of Saudi women, where users send and delete Snaps to comply with gender norms while maintaining streak metrics. Similarly, 72% of Indian participants avoided Snap Map to evade familial surveillance. These findings provide empirical support for the theory of cultural platformization, where users in restrictive contexts subvert default platform affordances to maintain social conformity while avoiding exposure (Qutub, 2018; Briziarelli, 2019). Such adaptations counter Western assumptions of platform universality and underscore the need for culturally contextualised platform governance (Davis & Xiao, 2021).

The regression and mediation models showed an indirect relationship between streak rituals and emotional exhaustion, through increased FOMO. This finding supports the idea of algorithmic labour developed by Duffy and Meisner (2023) and the work of content creators that involves engagement in unpaid digital housework to gain algorithmic exposure. This asymmetry between the investment of labour and the affective payoff demonstrates not only that there is an asymmetric attention economy that is exploitative but also that these measures make the social value (Mehta, 2019; Thorne, 2023).

In addition, algorithmic literacy was a strong correlate of FOMO, providing a significant replication of earlier studies reporting the psychological burden of algorithmic awareness. Remarkably, the cultural negotiation was a negative correlate of FOMO, which meant that creators who changed content to fit cultural norms would have felt less anxious (Wood, 2019). This observation highlights a type of digital resilience, which implies that practices that are culturally negotiated can defensively protect the psychological effects of opaque systems of algorithms (Zhou et al., 2025).

Overall, the present study introduces ephemeral permanence (the paradox where transient digital interactions create lasting psychological and behavioral impacts)as a cross-cultural behavioural paradigm—where transient digital interactions accumulate into enduring rituals with psychological costs. It advances platform temporalities theory by revealing how FOMO, burnout, and algorithmic awareness are shaped by sociocultural structures. Practically, it supports platform features like "streak-amnesty," AR content regulation, and culturally adaptive interface design. Policymakers should consider integrating metrics-based profiling safeguards (e.g., under EU DSA Articles 27–29) given the disproportionate psychological impact on minors and creators. Future research should incorporate platform

telemetry and longitudinal tracking to triangulate self-report data with behavioural realities and to address rising concerns over AR-induced dysmorphia.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Snapchat's features, such as streaks and AR filters, impact users' psychological well-being differently across cultures, with Indian users experiencing the highest Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Significant correlations emerged between algorithmic literacy, streak rituals, and FOMO, moderated by cultural individualism. The concept of "ephemeral permanence (the paradox where transient digital interactions create lasting psychological and behavioral impacts)highlights how transient interactions create lasting psychological burdens, particularly for creators and minors. These findings emphasize the necessity for culturally tailored platform designs and governance to mitigate burnout and FOMO. Future research should leverage platform telemetry to validate self-reports and explore AR-induced dysmorphia, supporting ethical policies like the EU's Digital Services Act to protect users in algorithm-driven ecosystems.

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