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Social isolation and social anxiety as drivers of generation Z's willingness to share personal information on social media

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Abstract

Generation Z's (gen z) sharing of personal information on social media is a growing phenomenon with significant ramifications. Existing research, however, focuses on examining the role of social and/or psychological factors and fails to consider how and when social, psychological, and organizational factors affect gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. To fill this gap, we propose a conceptual model based on the tenets of sociometer theory, to understand the dynamics of gen z's willingness to share personal information while considering its process and boundary conditions. Using a sequential multi-study design, we conducted an experiment followed by a survey to test our hypotheses using data collected from gen z in India. Our findings show that when gen z feels socially isolated/anxious, they are more likely to share personal information on social media. The effect of social isolation on sharing of personal information increases when gen z fear that they are missing out on the rewarding experiences others are having, are engaged in repetitive negative thoughts and perceive their firm's privacy policy as transparent and ethical. Our findings provide a better understanding of why, how, and when gen z's are willing to share personal information on social media. We extend existing limited research on the psychological aspects of digital natives' interaction with modern technologies. Our results equip social media marketing and brand managers with the knowledge they need to increase gen z's willingness to share personal information.

KEYWORDS

ethical privacy care, fear of missing out (FoMO), generation Z, information sharing, social isolation, social media

1 | INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (gen z) are the first digital natives, born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019). The existing body of research acknowledges that gen z is different from other generations in terms of their needs, preferences, attitudes, and behaviors (Priporas et al., 2017).

Gen z, compared with other generations, grew up in the age of smartphones and internet access, and hence they are more connected to these (Livingstone, 2018). In addition, high engagement with social media sharing is the norm for digital natives (Ameen et al., 2020). This has led to an increase in gen z's daily smartphone usage and the experience of social anxiety and social isolation (Association,

All authors contributed equally to the article.

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2018). Although smartphone usage has revolutionized the way they socialize, it also increased gen z's tendency to share private information online, which has been seen as a big issue when it comes to managing data privacy. Gen z represents 24% of the global population (McKercher et al., 2020). According to a recent survey by Gallop, 67% of gen z tend to trust institutions that hold or ask for their personal information as compared to 56% of other generations (Fleming & Adkins, 2016). They are aware of the risks but believe that nothing terrible will happen with their shared data. This tendency makes gen z particularly exposed to sharing personal information (Fleming & Adkins, 2016). While smartphones have enabled gen z to connect with each other, recent research also suggests that their usage has negative outcomes such as loneliness (Oberst et al., 2017). Social media have also been found to influence individuals and generate feelings of social exclusion (Vinales & Thomas, 2021). Importantly, negative feelings such as social anxiety and social isolation/loneliness can encourage gen z to share more personal information online, to gain social acceptance from others (Caplan, 2006; Crome et al., 2015; Erwin et al., 2004; Gross et al., 2002; Shepherd & Edelman, 2005).

Gen z accounts for 27% of India's total population which is approximately 375 million people, is one of the largest gen z populations in the world (Chakrabarty, 2019) and spends on an average 8 h per day online (Business Line, 2022). The idea of social isolation makes them even more anxious and uneasy, and makes them want to be socially involved all the time. Social anxiety can also be attributed to the changing nuclear family setup in modern India, where gen z are subject to helicopter parenting (J. L. Young, 2017).

In today's digital world, capturing consumer's personal information has become fundamental to many businesses as it improves customization, user experience, and targeted advertising (Line et al., 2020; Toubiana et al., 2010; W. Wang et al., 2015). Despite the significance of capturing consumers' personal information on social media, research examining why, how, and when consumers, and in particular gen z, are willing to share their personal information on social media is limited. Furthermore, as shown in Table 1, despite providing useful insights, previous studies have focused mainly on examining the role of social and/or psychological factors. Yet, these studies have failed to consider how social, psychological, and organizational factors, combined in one conceptual model, can affect gen z's willingness to share personal information. To fulfill this gap in the literature on consumers' sharing of personal information on social media, the current study draws attention to the important but overlooked social, psychological, and organizational factors in predicting gen z's personal information sharing on social media; namely social anxiety, social isolation, fear of missing out, rumination thinking, and perceived privacy care.

Understanding gen z's motives to share personal information voluntarily in the social media context is important, as the advent of social media technologies has completely altered the dynamics of social interaction (Osatuyi, 2013) and individuals' psychological perceptions tend to be key determinants. Based on the tenets of sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), we propose a

conceptual model to understand the dynamics of how social isolation affects gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media, while considering its process and boundary conditions. Specifically, this paper aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a relationship between social anxiety, social isolation, and gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media sites?

RQ2: How do rumination thinking, fear of missing out, and perceived ethical privacy care affect the relationships between social anxiety, social isolation, and sharing of personal information?

We conducted a sequential multi-study design: an experiment followed by a survey to enhance the external validity of our results and provide additional support for the dynamics of the relationship between social isolation and gen z's sharing of personal information on social media. Our study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to the *literature on social interactions* by extending the concepts of social isolation and social anxiety to gen z in the social media context. Previous research has focused mainly on social isolation of elderly individuals (Y. R. R. Chen & Schulz, 2016) or social anxiety extending beyond the gen z population (Yuan et al., 2022). This points to the importance of narrowing examinations of social anxiety from a general population to a more specific population and context. Further, a social interaction perspective adds a new understanding of gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media, by emphasizing the role of negative social motives in online sharing of personal information (Held, 1990).

Second, drawing on *sociometer theory*, we highlight how the mechanism of social anxiety mediates the influence of social isolation on sharing of personal information on social media. We argue that social anxiety, reflected by the fear of being judged by others, could be viewed as a measure of effectiveness in social interactions that also reflects acceptance from and/or rejection by others. Thus, when gen z believes that they are socially isolated or excluded (Gentina & Chen, 2019), they are more likely to experience social anxiety and in turn engage in sharing of personal information on social media (Caplan, 2006; Crome et al., 2015; Erwin et al., 2004; Gross et al., 2002; Shepherd & Edelman, 2005). Further, the need to be continually connected with others on social media can generate feelings that other people may be having better experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013) and engagement in repetitive negative thoughts. Thus, we expect that other feelings, such as FoMO and rumination thinking, to strengthen the relationship between social isolation and sharing of personal information on social media.

Third, we contribute to the *literature on sharing of personal information on social media*. Existing limited literature has primarily looked at *what* motivates individuals to engage in personal information sharing and through which mechanisms (Park et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2017). We extend existing knowledge by explaining *what* motivates gen z to share personal information on social media, *how* it develops, and *when* it is strong or weaker. We provide empirical

TABLE 1 A comprehensive literature review of quantitative studies on sharing of information

Authors	Independent variables	Classification	Mediators	Moderators	Dependent variables	Theory used	Study design & sample	Country
Bilgihan et al. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Consumer opinion leadership (COL) Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) 	Demographic, social, and psychological	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GenY dining information seeking and sharing behavior on social media 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey General population 	US
Consiglio et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social density 	Social	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers' propensity to share information 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web scraping survey General population & college students 	Italy
Gerlach et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Privacy policy permissiveness 	Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived privacy risk 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to disclose personal information 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiment General population 	Germany
Huang et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared goal pursuit 	Social	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers' interaction with others, such as the sharing of helpful tips and information 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative & experiments General population & college students 	US
Hur et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument quality Source credibility 	Contextual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information seeking Entertainment Relationship maintenance motives 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuance usage instructions Information sharing intentions 	Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and uses and gratifications theory (UGT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey General population 	Korea
Lin et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactivity Social presence Commitment Privacy risk Subjective norms 	Social, contextual and psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitude towards sharing information Intention to share information 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information sharing behavior 	Theory of reasoned action and social capital theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey College students 	US

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Authors	Independent variables	Classification	Mediators	Moderators	Dependent variables	Theory used	Study design & sample	Country
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome expectations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social ties 					
Luarn et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social conditions (tie strength, subjective norms, expressiveness, social support, and information sharing) • Perceptual conditions (perceived social benefit, perceived enjoyment, and perceived value) • Consumption-based conditions (customer satisfaction and communicator involvement) 	Social, psychological and contextual	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in behavior (sharing location and activities-related information) 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • General population 	Taiwan
Menon and Ranaweera (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close, exchange, and hybrid ties 	Social	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction, • Provider status • Customer power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers' post-service sharing of information (PSSI)-actual and intended behavior 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • General population 	Canada
Pai and Tsai (2016)	Social values (perceived member support) Hedonic values (enjoyment) Utilitarian values (community informativeness)	Social and psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self efficacy • Relationship duration • Community receptivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocity norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information-sharing behavior 	Consumer resource allocation theory and reciprocity framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • General population 	Taiwan
Premazzi et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial trust • Nature of the incentive given 	Psychological and contextual	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to provide information • Actual information disclosure behavior 	Social exchange theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiment • General population 	Italy
Song and Kim (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers' self-interests (service quality, enjoyment, and usefulness) 	Social, technological and psychological	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to share personal information with a fashion sales robot 	Information sharing theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • General population 	US

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Authors	Independent variables	Classification	Mediators	Moderators	Dependent variables	Theory used	Study design & sample	Country
Thompson and Siamagka (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social interaction (trust, social cognition and collaborativeness) Organizational privacy ethical care 	Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived information control Trust towards the organization 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers' willingness to share information and the accuracy of information they share 	Organizational privacy ethical care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey and experiment General population 	US
Zhang et al. (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase type (material or experiential) Situational 	Contextual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users' perceived social approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users' self monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Users' information-sharing behaviors on SNSs 	Self-presentation theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiment General population 	China
Our study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social isolation & social anxiety 	Psychological, social and organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of missing out, rumination thinking, perceive ethical care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gen z willingness to share private information 	Sociometer theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiment Survey 	India

evidence, using causal and correlational data, that social isolation and social anxiety increase gen z's tendency to share personal information on social media. We also provide evidence that FoMO, rumination thinking, and perceived ethical privacy care strengthen the effect of social isolation on sharing of personal information on social media.

We organize the remainder of this article as follows. First, we begin with a review of the literature and the theoretical background for our study. Second, we draw on sociometer theory, proposed by social psychology, to develop the hypotheses that we then test empirically across two studies. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual models. Finally, we discuss theoretical and managerial implications.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Information sharing

Personal information sharing refers to the information consumers share with others on social networking sites, which may include any information that refers to the self, including personal states, dispositions, events in the past, and plans for the future (R. Chen & Sharma, 2013). Existing studies find that individuals share their personal information online for different reasons, and that information sharing behavior is usually assumed to be benefit-oriented (Constant et al., 1994). For example, people share personal information and experiences with their friends and the general public to maintain a sense of connectedness and to build social capital (Osatuyi, 2013). In addition, McKnight et al. (2002) find that consumers share personal information because their trust in e-commerce allows them to overcome perceived risks. Specifically, in the social media context, social media characteristics such as interactivity and social presence facilitate information sharing to allow people to build their social networks and capital value (Lin et al., 2019). Sharing of information facilitates social bonding, helping individuals to overcome social exclusion and a sense of loneliness (Berger, 2014). It also acts as a mechanism of self-affirmation of consumers' positive image of being able to influence others by sharing useful information (Barasch & Berger, 2014).

In the firm context, firms use many ways to collect data about their customers, such as their online shopping behavior, through trackers, cookies, and online forms (Premazzi et al., 2010). Such data have become critical for the firms, as they can be used to provide a customized service to the firm's consumers (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999). However, more recently there is an increase in information asymmetry between the consumer and firm as to what data is being collected and how it is used. This leads to consumers' privacy concerns (Aiken & Boush, 2006; Culnan, 1993). Although there is a perceived risk of misuse of information through firms' sharing, it benefits the consumers by giving them easy access to more customized and convenient services, as well as saving them search and transaction time costs (Hui et al., 2007;

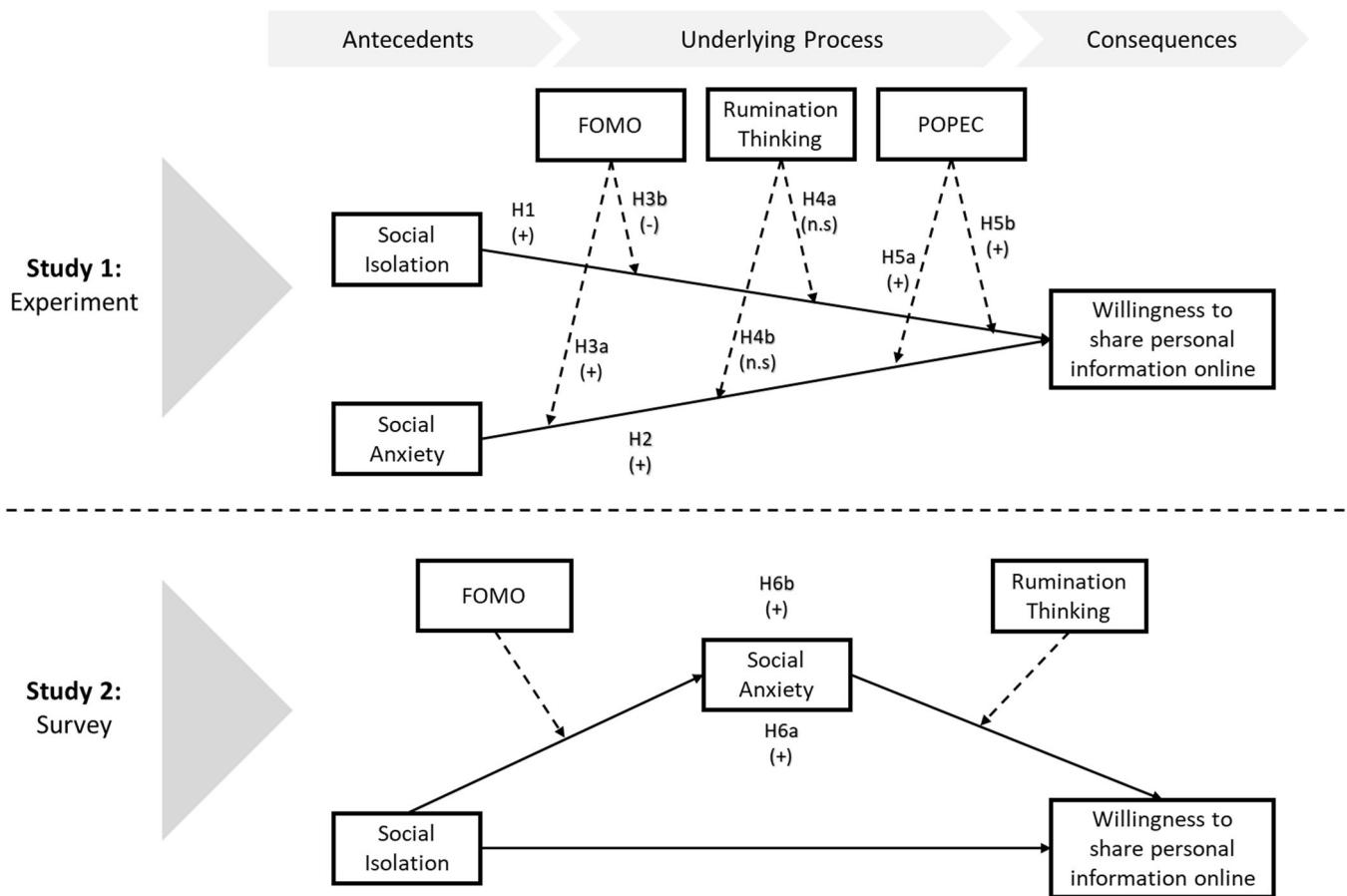


FIGURE 1 Conceptual models.

White, 2004). Firms have adopted various strategies, such as providing compensation and making efforts to build trust, to encourage consumers to share more information (Hui et al., 2007; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004; S. Wang et al., 2004). In the current research, we examine how perception of ethical privacy care can potentially become a tool to enable gen z to feel more secure and comfortable in sharing more information on social media.

2.2 | Sociometer theory

Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 502), state that the “need to belong, that is, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quality of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings.” According to sociometer theory (SMT), a sociometer acts as “an internal gauge of others’ evaluations of the individual” (Reitz et al., 2016; p. 909).

The need to socially belong is a fundamental driver of human behavior and individuals continuously attempt to minimize the risk of being socially isolated or excluded by others (Leary et al., 1995). Individuals monitor social cues they receive from others

about their relational value, which in turn affects how they feel and behave. SMT sheds light on how individuals are likely to display remedial behaviors, such as proactive performance (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2010; Miao, 2014; Schilpzand et al., 2016), which would enhance their relational value to others, when they feel socially excluded (Leary, 2012).

SMT provides a useful lens to understand how individuals such as gen z’s react to feelings of social isolation and social anxiety that may affect their perceived relational value and acceptance. As a mechanism for monitoring and responding to these feelings of reduced relational value and acceptance (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), individuals deliberately, and with effort, alter their behaviors to convey the intended image of self and success at self-presentation (Vohs et al., 2005). In line with SMT, we expect individuals who feel a strong need to improve relational value and acceptance, as reflected by their sociometer, to react positively to social stimuli and hence increase their tendency to engage in remedial behaviors such as sharing of personal information on social media (Snyder & DeBono, 1985). Although, SMT has yet to be utilized with respect to issues related to gen z, it provides a compelling framework to explain how social isolation would increase their tendency to share personal information on social media.

3 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 | Social isolation and social anxiety as antecedents to sharing of personal information on social media

Perceived social isolation, known colloquially as loneliness, has been defined as the “perceived absence of satisfying relationships, accompanied by symptoms of psychological distress that are related to the perceived absence” (J. E. Young, 1982; p. 380). However, Sermat (1978, p. 274) defined loneliness as discrepancy experienced between the kinds of interpersonal relationships the individuals perceive themselves as having and the kind of relationships they would like to have. Moreover, de Jong-Gierveld (1987, p. 120) defined loneliness or “felt social isolation” as a “situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality and quantity) of certain relationships. This includes situations, in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized.”

Studies also show that people who are lonely and who find it difficult to maintain social relationships tend to develop an addiction to the internet or being present online (Ang et al., 2018). Lonely people tend to cope with this by engaging in self-regulatory efforts to compensate for their self-esteem deficit (Ang et al., 2018; Pieters, 2013; J. Wang et al., 2012). The feeling of loneliness signals that one's connections to others are weakening and that the repair and maintenance of these connections to others is needed for one's health and well-being (Cacioppo et al., 2011). Furthermore, recent research among gen z reveals that almost 56% of this generation experienced more intense social isolation overall due to the Covid-19 pandemic and are more likely to say they were lonely as compared to previous generations (Cox, 2022).

The desire for having satisfying social relationships and the need to belong are fundamental and universal human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), irrespective of the generation to which human beings belong. According to belongingness literature in psychology, the need to socially belong is a fundamental driver of human behavior. Individuals actively and continuously attempt to maximize this by being relational to others (Leary et al., 1995). Building on this premise, sociometer theory posits that individuals are highly concerned when isolated, which reflects their relational value to others in their environment (Leary, 2005). When they feel isolated, their needs are deprived and they seek ways through which these needs can be fulfilled (Gardner et al., 2005). Feeling rejected elicits behavioral responses that aim to gain inclusion and avoid further rejections. The theory also posits that in such cases they respond to social cues that signal their relational value or the degree to which others regard them as valued group members (Leary, 2005) and increase their likelihood of acceptance (Van Lange et al., 2011).

Indeed, research finds that when individuals feel socially excluded, they engage in behaviors that could attenuate their adverse condition. For example, excluded individuals are more

interested in making friends and have a greater desire to work with others (Maner et al., 2007); they are more likely to conform to others' opinions (Williams et al., 2000), spend money on products that signal group membership (Mead et al., 2011), and mimic group members to enhance interpersonal rapport (Lakin et al., 2008). Research also finds that individuals share information with others and the public to build social capital and maintain a sense of connection (Erickson, 2011). Moreover, research has also shown that digital natives who are lonely are able to create quality relationships by disclosing information (Gentina & Chen, 2019).

Gen z is found to be more idealistic, having high levels of personal scrutiny compared to other generations (P. J. Chen & Choi, 2008). Hence, we argue that when gen z perceives they are socially isolated, they will be more willing to share more personal information online as a behavioral remedy to counter the current state. This is in line with findings that indicate that the act of sharing information instigates reciprocity effects (Kankanhalli et al., 2005), which could attenuate some of the perceived social isolation. Sharing of personal information is associated with entitlement to social capital, reputation, as well as the intrinsic benefit of being useful to the social network they are part of (Constant et al., 1994). In effect, gen z's sharing of personal information on social media may be viewed as a symbolic reminder of their relational value and desire to improve the quality and quantity of their social relationships. Hence, we hypothesize:

H1: *Gen z's perceived social isolation has a positive impact on their willingness to share personal information on social media.*

Social anxiety is defined as “a state of anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings” (Leary, 1983; p. 67). Thus, in a high social-anxiety context, individuals perceive a low likelihood of obtaining satisfactory interpersonal evaluations from others (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). According to Schlenker and Leary (1982), social anxiety reflects concerns either about typical social events (e.g. meeting someone for the first time) or concerns about social failures and criticism (e.g., being criticized, looking foolish). Therefore, the prospect of being evaluated by others, with all that that entails, tends to distinguish social anxiety from other types of anxiety. Social anxiety is a prevalent and sometimes debilitating personal problem. Although individuals have a strong need to feel a sense of belonging, they may be unable to do so due to their perceived social anxiety (Pierce, 2009).

The feeling of social anxiety can stimulate a conformist behavioral repertoire, to enhance one's relational value as well as reduce future anxiety. For example, empirical research suggests that individuals may use the internet as a means through which they can cope with social anxiety (Caplan, 2002; Shepherd & Edelman, 2005). Extant research establishes that individuals who are socially anxious are more comfortable with online platforms and computer-mediated communication than face-to-face communication (Caplan, 2006; Crome et al., 2015; Erwin et al., 2004; Gross et al., 2002; Shepherd

& Edelman, 2005). The online medium takes away the fearful aspects of social interaction (e.g., blushing, stammering, others' reactions to perceived physical or social shortcomings) as well as enabling individuals to fulfill their needs for interpersonal contact and relationships (Erwin et al., 2004). Moreover, individuals who are socially anxious believe online settings bring out better self-presentation efficacy, thereby resulting in them believing it be the most effective means to build relationships (Caplan, 2006; Pierce, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). For this reason, we believe that gen z's who feel socially anxious are more likely to engage in sharing personal information on social media, as a proactive effort to enhance their self-presentation efficacy. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2: *Gen z's perceived social anxiety has a positive impact on their willingness to share personal information on social media.*

3.2 | The moderating effect of fear of missing out (FoMO)

FoMO is defined as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al., 2013; p. 1841), and the intense desire to remain connected and informed with other people's experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO was first introduced in the marketing literature by Herman (2000), to explain the consumption of limited-edition brands. In contrast, researchers in psychology such as Przybylski et al. (2013) were the first to assert that FoMO is associated with social media usage to satisfy social needs. According to social media reports, FoMO is growing as a result of an increase in experiential consumption and an increase social media usage. Social media allows users to see the wide range of experiences that other people enjoy, which leads to many people constantly checking it to avoid the feeling of missing out or being “left behind” (Salem, 2015).

Studies suggests that FoMO can assist students in overcoming barriers to learn (Alt, 2017). Furthermore, consumer researchers argue that FoMO can create anxiety about missing out especially when they anticipate how they might feel if the outcome of an upcoming event could later produce an elating experience (Mandel & Nowlis, 2008). FoMO has been viewed as a perceived deficit in psychological needs, such as the need to belong, and social relatedness (Alt, 2017; Beyens et al., 2016; Good & Hyman, 2020; Roberts & David, 2020). Thus, FoMO can be triggered when individuals' psychological needs, such as social capital (Xie et al., 2018) and/or self-esteem, are low (Buglass et al., 2017; Bui et al., 2021; Przybylski et al., 2013). Further, when the need to belong is low, a fear of not being part of a satisfying social experience can develop, which can then motivate individuals to interact on social media to satisfy their social need to belong (Roberts & David, 2020). In support, Wegmann et al. (2017) argue that the need to maintain continual connections and fear of missing out on them can result in content sharing online.

SMT maintains that individuals' relational value rises and falls with greater magnitude when they have staked their social acceptance as very important (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Satisfying social needs triggered by feelings of social isolation and social anxiety may depend on the degree to which one regards their absence as central to one's self-schema. Thus, we argue that, if an individual feels socially excluded or anxious, this can trigger their feelings of missing out on the rewarding experiences of others (Miller, 2012). Taking this idea further, gen z who have a high FoMO may have sociometers more sensitive to signs of relational deprivation. This would warn them to take corrective action to remain connected with other people's experiences (Leary, 1999; Schilpzand et al., 2016). In the presence of a high level of FoMO, could result in increased levels of authentic self-presentation such as increased online interactivity (P. Wang et al., 2018). A greater sense of FoMO would strengthen the effect of gen z's perceived social isolation and social anxiety on sharing of personal information on social media, and hence we propose the following hypotheses:

H3a: *Gen z's fear of missing out (FoMO) positively moderates the relationship between perceived social isolation and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

H3b: *Gen z's fear of missing out (FoMO) positively moderates the relationship between perceived social anxiety and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

3.3 | The moderating effect of rumination thinking

Rumination thinking is a class of conscious thoughts that revolves around a common instrumental theme, and that recurs in the absence of immediate environmental demands requiring thought (L. L. Martin & Tesser, 1996; p.7). When individuals ruminate as a response to some unpleasant triggers, the repeated thoughts that are formed are negatively relevant to them (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2003). Rumination thinking tends to reduce self-control, increase impulse responses, and lead to poor decision-making due to slower cognitive information processing (Denson et al., 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). When ruminating, individuals also tend to become stuck in their negative emotions because they give more attention to their negative emotions (P. Liu et al., 2019). Such individuals may also experience decreased social support, as their friends might get irritated and grow tired of the rumination (Spasojević et al., 2003). Past research in the online context finds rumination thinking to be associated with eroding social support (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008).

Researchers suggest that individuals often ruminate when encountering self-threat (Ray et al., 2005) and some ruminate a great deal more than others (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Prior research identifies that rumination can increase self-critical valuation, thereby influencing individuals to correct their behaviors and correspond with the social good (Bushman et al., 2005; Denson et al., 2011; Pedersen et al., 2011). Research has also considered the reflection side of rumination (Wade et al., 2008), where a person

purposefully focus on contemplating and engaging in active problem solving (Black & Pössel, 2013; Burwell & Shirk, 2007; Sajtos & Chong, 2018).

Drawing on SMT, we argue that, for individuals who feel socially excluded and/or anxious, their sociometer would warn and motivate them to ruminate or revisit these negative cues to engage in adaptive behaviors (Leary, 1999; Schilpzand et al., 2016). This suggests that gen z who experience rumination thinking are more likely to revisit their episodes of low social evaluation, such as social isolation and social anxiety, which then reinforces the effect of perceived social isolation and social anxiety on their willingness to share personal information on social media. Thus, we hypothesize:

H4a: *Gen z's rumination thinking positively moderates the relationship between perceived social isolation and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

H4b: *Gen z's rumination thinking positively moderates the relationship between perceived social anxiety and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

3.4 | The moderating effect of perceived ethical privacy care

Ethical privacy care (EPC) refers to actively understanding consumers perceived concerns and taking actions to alleviate these concerns, such as clearly communicating the firms' data privacy and handling policy (Thompson & Siamagka, 2022). Privacy concerns, which refer to consumers' perceived risk associated with losing control of their data, is one of the core constructs in the privacy literature (Milne et al., 2017; Slepchuk et al., 2022). A large number of studies have shown an increase in consumers' privacy concerns due to an increase in the collection of their personal information by firms (King & Raja, 2012; K. D. Martin & Murphy, 2017; Norberg & Horne, 2007). The literature, in terms of consumer privacy, has begun to provide evidence that individuals' data privacy and sharing of personal information online can have significant ramifications (Chakraborty et al., 2013).

Consumers privacy concerns and their willingness to share information online tend to be affected by many factors (Thompson & Siamagka, 2022). These factors include personalization options provided to consumers to protect their privacy, like opt in or data control, price changes in exchange for privacy, and firm transparency (Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2020). Consumers are also willing to provide their personal information in certain contexts, such as enrolling in a loyalty program or engaging in a shopping task (Sayre & Horne, 2000; Spiekermann et al., 2001). Addressing consumers' privacy concerns can result in an increased willingness to share their personal information (Thompson & Siamagka, 2022).

According to sociometer theory, individuals are continuously looking for cues of acceptance and rejection, to enhance relational value (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Ronen & Baldwin, 2010). Thus, we

argue that when gen z feels socially isolated or anxious, they will take adaptive actions to remedy these negative feelings. Sharing of personal information on social media is one of the behavioral changes that they pursue to do this. Further, when the organization provides EPC, it will allay their privacy concerns and the magnitude of information shared will increase. Therefore, we expect that EPC will strengthen the relationships between social isolation, social anxiety, and willingness to share information on social media. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H5a: *Gen z's perceived ethical care positively moderates the relationship between perceived social isolation and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

H5b: *Gen z's perceived ethical care positively moderates the relationship between perceived social anxiety and willingness to share personal information on social media.*

3.5 | The mediating role of social anxiety

As per social exclusion-anxiety hypothesis in psychology, among human beings social anxiety is a typical adaptation to real or potential social exclusion (Baumeister & Tice, 1990; Buss, 1990). It has been empirically established that social isolation is one of the most important reasons for social anxiety (Olsson et al., 2000). Further, social anxiety can lead to an increase in sharing of personal information on social media (Caplan, 2006; Crome et al., 2015; Erwin et al., 2004; Gross et al., 2002; Shepherd & Edelman, 2005). In line with sociometer theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and the argument presented above, we anticipate that gen z's feelings of social anxiety will mediate the effect of social isolation on their willingness to share personal information online. As shown in our conceptual models, illustrated in Figure 1, hypotheses 1 and 2 predict the direct influence of social isolation and social anxiety on sharing of personal information. Hypotheses 3 and 4 test the positive moderating influence of FoMO and rumination thinking on the relationships between social anxiety, social isolation, and sharing of personal information. Researchers identify models of such configurations as moderated mediation models (Preacher et al., 2007). Thus, we provide the final hypothesis which specifies overall moderated mediating effects, as shown in Figure 1.

H6a: *Gen z's perceptions of social isolation will be related to willingness to share personal information on social media via mediating effects of social anxiety*

H6b: *Gen z's perceptions of social isolation will be related to willingness to share personal information on social media via conditional indirect effects, such that its relationship with sharing of information will be moderated by FoMO and rumination thinking, and mediated by social anxiety.*

4 | OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We examined our theoretical models, as depicted in Figure 1, using a sequential multi-study design. In study 1, we experimentally manipulated participants' social isolation and social anxiety and examined whether these psychological mechanisms impact their tendency to share personal information on social media. In Study 1, we also tested the moderating effects of FoMO, rumination thinking and ethical privacy care. In Study 2, we extended Study 1 using a survey design, to establish the external validity of study 1's results. Study 2 also ascertained the mediating role of social anxiety, and established whether FoMO and rumination thinking serve as boundary conditions to the relationship between social isolation and gen z's willingness to share personal information through a moderated mediation model. Basic demographic variables, such as gender and employment, were collected as control variables. Gender was captured as male, female or other. Employment was captured as unemployed, part-time or full-time). Gender and employment had no impact on our results. We report all manipulations and all hypothesis-related measures.

5 | STUDY 1: EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

The objective of study 1 was to establish the causal effect of gen z's perceived social isolation and social anxiety on willingness to share personal information on social media (H1 & H2). In study 1 we also investigated the moderating influence of FoMO, rumination thinking, and ethical privacy care on these two main effects (H3, H4, and H5).

5.1 | Sample and procedure

We conducted a 2 × 2 between subject experimental design (high vs low social isolation; high vs low social anxiety) using Qualtrics online survey. We used a market research agency in India to collect data from gen z respondents. A total of 202 responses were collected. Each respondent was paid approximately 1 USD for their participation in the study. To ensure data quality, we removed a total of 42 responses due to missing data and failure of attention check questions, leaving us with a usable sample size of 160 responses. These 160 respondents were randomly assigned to the four cells in which social isolation (high vs low) and social anxiety (high vs low) were manipulated.

Social Isolation was manipulated using the cyberball game. This method has been successfully used in past studies to manipulate social isolation (R. P. Chen et al., 2017; Williams & Jarvis, 2006; Williams et al., 2000). The cyberball game can be played in a browser by providing a link such that the respondents would feel that they are playing in a real online multiplayer game with two other players (see Appendix B). In the high social isolation condition the participant would only be part of two throws, out of the total 10 throws (either as the receiver or as the thrower), while in the low social isolation

condition the participant would be part of eight throws out of the total 10 throws (either as the receiver or as the thrower). Social anxiety was manipulated by asking the respondents to imagine a scenario and write about their feelings when they faced such a situation. Scenarios to be imagined varied based on high or low social anxiety (see Appendix C).

5.2 | Measures

We used existing scales and adapted them to capture the study constructs. All the variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). We instructed our gen z participants to indicate their agreement to the specific items. For our dependent variable, we used Thompson and Siamagka (2021)'s scale to capture gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. Statements such as, "When I am asked for my personal information, I reveal a large amount online," "I disclose quite extensive personal information online," "I always give accurate information online when I am asked for my personal details" were used. Our independent variable, social isolation, was measured using an adapted 5-point version of the scale developed by Choi and Noh (2020). Some of the statements for social isolation included, "I do not have anyone to socialize with," "I have no one I can trust," and "I feel excluded from others around me."

Social anxiety was captured using a 5-item scale adapted from Elhai et al. (2018) and Mattick and Clarke (1998). In the social anxiety scale, some of the items that participants had to respond to included, "I have difficulty talking with other people," "I worry about expressing myself in case I appear awkward," and "I am nervous mixing with people I do not know well," among others. Our moderating variables, FoMO and rumination thinking, were measured using scales adapted from and Przybylski et al. (2013) and Elhai et al. (2018) respectively. We used 5 items to measure FoMO and some of the statements included, "I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me," "I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me," and "I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to."

Rumination thinking was measured using a 6-item scale. Some of the statements included, "I find that my mind often goes over things again and again," "When I have a problem, it will gnaw on my mind for a long time," and "I tend to replay past events as I would have liked them to happen."

EPC was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Thompson and Siamagka (2021). Some of the statements include, "Social network sites devote every effort to help their customers feel more comfortable when sharing their personal information online," "Social network sites truly care about how the customers feel about sharing their personal information," "Social network sites listen carefully to its customers' concerns about their privacy online," "Social network sites share information about what is done to protect the online personal information of their users," and "Social network sites communicate regularly with customers about privacy issues online."

5.3 | Analysis and results

5.3.1 | Manipulation check

The social isolation manipulation check was measured using an established scale (Choi & Noh, 2020). We used one way ANOVA to compare the means. The ANOVA result ($F(1, 158) = 85.571, p < 0.05$) was significant, which means that the manipulation for social isolation was successful. Similarly, the social anxiety manipulation check was measured using an established scale (Elhai et al., 2018; Mattick & Clarke, 1998). We used one-way ANOVA to compare the means. The ANOVA result ($F(1, 158) = 32.257, p < 0.05$) was significant, which means that the manipulation for social isolation was also successful.

5.3.2 | Main effect

The effect of perceived social isolation (high and low) on gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media was tested by comparing their means. The same scale as that in the previous studies was used to capture willingness to share personal information on social media (Thompson & Siagagka, 2021). We used one way ANOVA to compare the means. The ANOVA result ($F(1, 158) = 8.449, p < 0.05, \eta_p^2 = 0.051$) was significant, indicating a significant difference between the groups. This means that social isolation had a significant impact on willingness to share information online, supporting H1. Similarly, the effect of perceived social anxiety (high and low) on gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media was tested by comparing their means. We used one-way ANOVA to compare the means. The ANOVA result ($F(1, 158) = 8.741, p < 0.05, \eta_p^2 = 0.052$) was significant. There is a significant difference between the groups. This means that social anxiety had a significant impact on gen z's willingness to share information on social media, supporting H2.

5.3.3 | Moderating effect of FoMO, EPC, and rumination thinking

To test the moderating effect of FoMO on the relationship between social isolation and willingness to share information on social media, we used PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017). The model showed that the interaction term was significant, indicating the presence of moderation by FoMO ($F(3, 156) = 14.126, R^2 = 0.2136, p < 0.05$). The β value of the interaction term was 0.3793, indicating a positive moderation of the relationship. Similarly, we used PROCESS model 1 to test the moderating effect of FoMO on the relationship between social anxiety and willingness to share information on social media. A significant interaction term indicates moderation by FoMO ($F(3, 156) = 14.789, R^2 = 0.2214, p < 0.05$). The β value of the interaction term was -0.3161 , indicating a negative moderation effect.

Similarly, for testing EPC moderation we used PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017). The model showed that the interaction term was

significant, indicating the presence of moderation by EPC ($F(3, 156) = 16.892, R^2 = 0.2445, p < 0.05$). The β value of the interaction term was 0.3239, indicating a positive moderation of the relationship. Similarly using PROCESS model 1 to test the moderating effect of EPC on the relationship between social anxiety and willingness to share information, a significant interaction term indicated moderation by EPC ($F(3, 156) = 15.6935, R^2 = 0.2318, p < 0.05$). The β value of the interaction term was 0.1458, indicating a positive moderation of the relationship. Finally, we tested the moderating effect of rumination thinking on the relationship between social isolation and willingness to share information on social media using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017). The interaction term was not significant, and hence there was no moderating effect. A significant interaction effect was also absent in the social anxiety and willingness to share information relationship.

5.4 | Discussion

The findings of the experiment in study 1 establish that both social isolation and social anxiety have a positive direct impact on gen z's propensity to share information on social media, confirming H1 and H2. Further, we find support for the moderating hypotheses H3a, H5a and H5b. These indicate that the relationship of social anxiety, as well as social isolation, with the willingness to share information is moderated by FoMO and EPC. FoMO positively moderates the social isolation to willingness to share information relationship, but negatively moderates the social anxiety to willingness to share information relationship, thereby leading us to reject H3b. This unexpected result indicates that, although gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media is driven by their feelings of social anxiety, when they also feel that they may miss out on what others are experiencing on social media, this fear of missing out seems to play a stronger role than social anxiety in shaping their willingness to share personal information on social media. At the same time, EPC positively moderates both the social anxiety and social isolation relationships with willingness to share information. The results show that gen z are willing to share their personal information online when they feel socially isolated or anxious, and that these feelings can become more pronounced due to FoMO and EPC.

6 | STUDY 2: SURVEY

In Study 2, we extended the model from Study 1 by analyzing a moderated mediating model. We analyzed the moderating effects of FoMO and rumination thinking, and the mediating effect of social anxiety. Unlike Study 1, we focused only on examining the moderating effects of FoMO and rumination thinking, to explore further the mixed moderating effect of FoMO and the insignificant results of rumination thinking found in Study 1. The aim of Study 2 was to provide deeper understanding of the relationship between

social isolation and willingness to share personal information, by examining the process and boundary condition of this relationship.

6.1 | Sample and procedure

To test our model, we conducted our online survey using Qualtrics, drawing on a sample from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants from India with a historical human intelligence task (HIT) approval rate of over 90% were identified and participated in the study. Each respondent was paid 1 USD for their participation in the study. A total of 252 gen z's completed the online survey.

As in Study 1, we used the same measures and to enhance data quality, a combination of screening and attention check questions. Participants were removed from the sample if they failed to answer these questions satisfactorily. For example, if respondents selected above 25 years old, they were removed from the sample. We also instructed the respondents to answer a question related to the context of the study (i.e., social media usage using smartphones). If respondents failed to select the correct answer they were also eliminated from the sample. Of these 252 gen z participants, 84.8% were males and 15.2% females. 96.4% were employed and 3.6% were students. All the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher.

To reduce issues of common method bias, and in line with past studies (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012), we followed the following procedures. First, we provided clear instructions and assured respondents that their responses would remain anonymized. Second, the order of the questions was randomized to avoid respondents being able to identify the constructs and the flow of the survey. Third, we carried out a check for common method bias using a marker variable technique, using a variable unrelated to our case (prevention focus). We adjusted our correlations to account for our marker variable to minimize CMB. After this adjustment, correlations remained significant and in the appropriate direction. In addition, the assessment of the latent variables did not show any strong correlations. This provide support that there was no issue of CMB in our model (Kock, 2015). Table 2, below, provides the details of the reliability and validity of the constructs used in our study, and Table 3 shows the correlation among variables of the study

TABLE 2 Measurement of study constructs: Study 2

Constructs (dimensions)	No of scale items		α	C.R	AVE	Item loading
	Original	Final				
Social Isolation	5	5	0.94	0.95	0.81	0.87,0.91,0.90,0.90,0.88
Social Anxiety	5	5	0.92	0.94	0.75	0.84,0.87,0.87,0.89,0.85
Willingness to Share Personal Information Online	6	6	0.86	0.90	0.59	0.63,0.70,0.77,0.83,0.79,0.84
Fear of Missing Out	5	5	0.84	0.89	0.62	0.75,0.81,0.83,0.73,0.79
Rumination Thinking	6	6	0.88	0.91	0.62	0.77,0.77,0.77,0.78,0.80,0.80

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability.

6.2 | Analysis and results

6.2.1 | Scale evaluations

We used structural equation modeling Smart PLS 3.0 to analyze our data. Consistent with previous studies (J. C. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), we first tested the measurement model followed by the structural model. The mediating and moderated mediation models were tested using PROCESS models 4 & 21 (Hayes, 2017) with 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% CI.

The results for our measurement model achieved an overall good fit. The convergent validity of the model was supported, as the average variance extracted (AVE) for all the constructs was > 0.05. The composite reliability (CR) varied from 0.89 to 0.95 and is within the acceptable thresholds confirming internal consistencies. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), as well as Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant validity results indicated scores of < 0.90, which are within acceptable thresholds confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

6.2.2 | Hypothesis testing

To test the mediating effect of social anxiety on the relationship between gen z's perceived social isolation and willingness to share personal information on social media, we used PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2017) with 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% CIs. All the

TABLE 3 Correlations among variables: Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Isolation	1				
2. Social Anxiety	0.79**	1			
3. Willingness to Share Personal Information Online	0.55**	0.53**	1		
4. Fear of Missing Out	0.72**	0.70**	0.59**	1	
5. Rumination Thinking	0.67**	0.67**	0.53**	0.70**	1

variables were continuous and mean-centered. In line with our Hypothesis 1, social isolation has a direct influence on willingness to share personal information ($\beta = 0.39$, $SE = 0.40$, $t = 3.28$, $p < 0.00$). Furthermore, social anxiety mediates the path of social isolation to willingness to share personal information ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 1.66$, $p < 0.10$). In particular, as social isolation increases, social anxiety increases, ($\beta = 0.80$, $SE = 0.80$, $t = 29.22$, $p < 0.00$), thus supporting H6a.

Furthermore, the moderated mediation model for testing the moderating effect of FoMO and rumination thinking on the social isolation and information sharing relationship was tested using PROCESS model 21 (Hayes, 2017), using 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% CIs. FoMO positively moderates the relationship between gen z's perceived social isolation and social anxiety ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$, $LLCI = 0.0235$ to $ULCI = 0.1186$). Furthermore, the findings indicate that as rumination thinking increases, the effect of social anxiety on gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media increases ($\beta = 0.17$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < 0.00$, $LLCI = 0.1228$ to $ULCI = 0.2260$). These results imply that gen z with perceived social isolation and rumination thinking are willing to share personal information online. Finally, the results provide support for H6b, which confirms the significance of the conditional indirect effects ($\beta = 0.012$, $SE = 0.071$, $LLCI = 0.0015$ to $ULCI = 0.0247$) and significance as a moderated mediated model (Tables 4 and 5).

6.3 | Discussion

The findings of Study 2, using a survey design, corroborate the findings of Study 1. As in Study 1, we see that gen z with greater social isolation have a higher tendency to share personal information on social media. In addition, the results of Study 2 shows a moderated mediation effect where FoMO and rumination thinking positively moderate the mediating effect of social anxiety. Social anxiety can be viewed as a mediating path after experiencing social isolation. Our findings also demonstrate that FoMO and rumination thinking can intensify the impact of gen z's perceived social isolation on willingness to share personal information on social media. Thus,

Study 2 sheds lights not only on why and how gen z are willing to share personal information on social media. but also when their willingness to share personal information on social media is intensified.

7 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Prior research has emphasized how gen z's love for social media and related isolation, as well as poor diet, are affecting their short- and long-term health (Priporas et al., 2022). In addition, previous studies about gen z's interaction with technology have also demonstrated their tech savviness and willingness to adopt new technologies (Romero & Lado, 2021) as well as how their interaction with mobile content leads to their engagement (Mulier et al., 2021). The current research began with an attempt to better understand why, how, and when gen z's perception of social isolation and social anxiety influences their online sharing of personal information. In our study we theorize and find that the increase in gen z's sharing of personal information on social media is not a function of psychological and/or social factors only but it's a function of social, psychological and organizational factors. Across two sequential studies using experimental (Study1) and survey data (Study 2), we are able to examine and better understand the dynamics of social isolation and sharing of personal information on social media relationships. Our study provides better understanding of why, how, and when gen z's perceptions of social isolation and social anxiety influence their online sharing of personal information. Our results support the hypothesized relationships, which are drawn on the sociometer theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and uncover new and interesting insights. First, social isolation is directly related to gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. The more gen z's feel socially isolated/anxious, the more likely they are to share personal information on social media. This finding is consistent with Ameen et al. (2022)'s argument that generation z is one of the generations most concerned with their well-being. Second, social anxiety has a direct and mediating effect on the relationship between social isolation and gen z's willingness to share personal information on

TABLE 4 Hypotheses testing: Direct and mediating effects: Study 2

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	SE	T Statistics	p Values	Decision
H1	Social Isolation-> Willingness to Share Personal Information Online	0.39	0.40	3.28	0.00	Supported
H2	Social Anxiety-> Willingness to Share Personal Information Online	0.23	0.23	1.68	.00	Supported
H6a	Mediating effect: Social isolation-> Social Anxiety-> Willingness to Share Personal Information Online	0.18	0.18	1.66	0.10	Supported

TABLE 5 Hypotheses testing: Moderating mediating effect (FoMO and Rumination Thinking) Study 2

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Decision
H6B	FoMO & Rumination Thinking	0.0124	0.0071	0.0015	0.0247	Supported

social media. Third, FoMO, rumination thinking, and ethical privacy care partially moderate the relationship between social isolation and gen z's sharing of personal information on social media. Gen z are more willing to share personal information on social media when they fear that they are missing out on the rewarding experiences other are having, engaged in repetitive thought processing, or perceive that firms' privacy care policies are transparent and ethical. Our results are consistent with H. Liu et al. (2021)'s findings, which highlight FoMO as a key driver of gen z's social media use and a contextual moderator of the relationships between their psychological states and behavioral responses.

7.1 | Theoretical implications

We make several important contributions to the literature. First, this study is the first to highlight and empirically examine the important roles of social, psychological, and organizational factors in explaining consumers' sharing of personal information on social media. We further contribute to the literature on information sharing on social media by describing the process through which these factors impact gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. Specifically, we test the direct and indirect effects of social factors such as social anxiety and social isolation, the moderating effects of psychological factors such as rumination thinking and fear of missing out, and organizational factors such as perceived ethical privacy care, on the relationship between social isolation and gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. By doing so, we bridge the literature on personal information sharing on social media with social isolation and gen z literature to expand our understanding of its processes and boundary conditions.

This understanding is needed to design effective strategies to increase gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. People share information for a variety of reasons, such as maintaining a sense of connectedness, building social capital (Osatuyi, 2013), online trust (McKnight et al., 2002), interactivity, and social presence (Lin et al., 2019). Although empirical evidence shows that social anxiety and social isolation are positively related to internet usage (C. Y. Liu & Kuo, 2007), no prior studies examine the dynamics of the relationships depicted in our conceptual model, either in general or in relation to gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. Existing literature (e.g., Park et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2017) has overlooked the important roles of social, psychological, and organizational factors in affecting consumers', particularly gen z's, willingness to share personal information on social media.

Second, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to use sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) to understand digital natives' willingness to share personal information on social media. As per the theory, behavioral changes like sharing personal information online manifest in gen z as an adaptive mechanism against perceived social isolation and social anxiety, and are an attempt to improve social value/acceptance. Third, unlike most

existing studies on information sharing on social media, which focus on a single study design, we conduct a sequential multi-study design using an experiment followed by a survey, to enhance the internal and external validity of our findings, and to provide deeper understanding on the dynamics of sharing personal information on social media. Our results provide causal and correlational support on the key roles of social isolation, social anxiety, fear of missing out, rumination thinking, and ethical privacy care in affecting gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media.

Fourth, by consciously focusing on digital natives who are more likely to share personal information on social media, we contribute to the nascent but growing literature on digital natives and transformational service research. Our research is in line with transformative service research literature relating to issues of privacy and consumer well-being (L. Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). Our study results highlight organizations' need to invest in privacy ethical care to safeguard gen z's shared personal information and improve their well-being. With the advent of technology such as mobile apps, and social media, gen z may be more exposed to risks related to data privacy that could negatively affect their well-being. Finally, we also focus on gen z in India as an example of a developing country with a high percentage of smartphone and internet usage (Abbas, 2021), as existing research tends to focus mainly on developed countries (see Table 1). India also stands out as a suitable context for data collection as 27% of its population is classified as gen z (Kar, 2021).

7.2 | Managerial implications

The gen z population is of much interest to marketers, since they are the true digital natives and very little is known about their decision-making and cognitive processes. This study provides social media marketing and brand managers with guidance and insights into how they can effectively increase gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. We highlight why, how, and when gen z are willing to share personal information on social media. Our findings have lucrative managerial implications as they can equip social media marketing and brand managers with the knowledge they need to increase gen z's willingness to share personal information. Further, our findings can aid them in the development of successful strategies that can facilitate the transformation of maladaptive psychological evaluations (e.g., rumination thinking and social anxiety) into adaptive outcomes (i.e., sharing of personal information), and enhance their understanding of the dynamics of gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media.

Drawing on sociometer theory, we extend managers' knowledge of why, how, and when gen z is willing to share personal information on social media. Our findings support the direct and indirect effects of social isolation on this willingness. Moreover, gen z is more willing to share such information on social media when they feel socially isolated and anxious, or when they feel that they are missing out on the rewarding experiences others are having, engaged in repetitive thought processing, or perceiving privacy care policies as transparent and ethical.

Social media and brand managers can add more features to facilitate social interactions while reducing the fear of being socially excluded and negatively judged by others. For example, they can use more social media influencers to motivate gen z to share personal information, while providing the option to remain anonymous for those who may feel socially anxious. They could create online communities where gen z feels like they belong and are comfortable to open up and to share personal information. Social media and brand managers can also add more features such regular pop ups to enhance gen z's perceptions of privacy care policies' transparency and ethicality, promote their consumers best privacy interests, and enhance their willingness to share personal information, which can in turn lead to better customer engagement. It would be in the best interests of social media marketing and managers to make their users believe that all processes involved in sharing and storing their personal information are fully secure and that no employees or third parties are involved in the process; this would encourage them to share more personal information. Social media marketing and brand managers may also wish to create exciting and inclusive virtual events to address gen z's need to belong and fears of being left out, which can also result in lucrative implications for them and their consumers. Alternatively, brands and social media marketing managers could target gen z with perceived social exclusion and identify groups where people like them to belong. This could be done through advertising, conveying messages of similar interests to meet their similar need for belonging. For example, Facebook uses "What's on your mind?" almost like a conversation to make users feel like others want to listen to them, and in the process guiding gen z to share information online. The nonpersonal/non-face-to-face nature of online communication is what makes it attractive for socially anxious users.

7.3 | Future research directions

We have adopted a sequential multi-study design to validate our hypotheses, which gives our findings good internal and external validity. In our study we have used sharing of personal information on social media as the outcome variable. Researchers could pursue multiple facets of this variable, such as the amount and accuracy of information shared, or use other variables such as purchase intentions and engagement.

While we have looked separately at rumination thinking, EPC, and FoMO as key moderators to the relationships between gen z's perceived social isolation and willingness to share personal information on social media, we have not looked at their interaction effect.

Another area that researchers could also look at in the future is the interaction of social isolation and social anxiety with other drivers of online sharing of personal information, like altruism and trust.

We used India as the context for conducting our study, but an intercountry/culture comparison might throw up interesting cross-cultural variation effects, as culture may be an important factor in

explaining the dynamics of gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media.

An intergenerational study of the novel effects studied by us is also warranted.

Our study did not focus on a specific type of social media site. However, we acknowledge that social media sites differ in terms of purpose, interaction dynamics, and features. Thus, future research may investigate if and how gen z's sharing of personal information may differ according to a type of social media platform (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter). Finally, examining both the antecedents and consequences of gen z's sharing of personal information on social media may provide better understanding of the dynamics of gen z's interactions on social media.

8 | CONCLUSION

Our study is the first to investigate the key roles of social, psychological, and organizational factors in explaining gen z's sharing of personal information on social media. Our findings show the importance of perceived social isolation, social anxiety, fear of missing out, rumination thinking, and privacy ethical care in increasing gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. Social media marketing and brand managers may benefit from further investing features that facilitate gen z's social interactions and manage their anxiety of being negatively judged, feelings of being left out or engaging in repetitive negative thought processing, to enhance their willingness to share personal information on social media. Moreover, social media marketing and brand managers should also communicate clearly and actively to gen z their privacy care and safeguarding policies and practices, to enhance gen z's willingness to share personal information on social media. Tables 4 and 5.

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APPENDIX: A

Table A1

TABLE A1 Measurement scales- Study 1 & 2

Constructs (dimensions)	α	C.R	AVE
Social Isolation (Choi & Noh, 2020)	0.94	0.95	0.81
I do not have anyone to socialize with			
I have no one I can trust.			
I feel excluded from others around me			
There's nobody I can go to when I need help			
I'm Lonely			
Social Anxiety (Elhai et al., 2018; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)	0.92	0.94	0.75
I have difficulty talking with other people			
I worry about expressing myself in case I appear awkward			
I am nervous mixing with people I do not know well			
I feel I will say something embarrassing when talking			
When mixing in a group, I find myself worrying I will be ignored			
Willingness to Share Personal Information Online (Thompson & Siamagka, 2021)	0.86	0.90	0.59
When I am asked for my personal information, I reveal a large amount online.			
I disclose quite extensive personal information online.			
When asked, I always share a great amount of my personal information online			
I always give accurate information online when I am asked for my personal detail			
Things I reveal about myself online are accurate reflections of who I really am			
When asked, I always share my accurate personal information online			
Fear of Missing Out (Przybylski et al., 2013)	0.84	0.89	0.62
I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me.			
I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun with- out me.			
I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are upto.			
It is important that I understand my friends "in jokes."			
When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me.			
Rumination Thinking (Elhai et al., 2018)	0.88	0.91	0.62
I find that my mind often goes over things again and again			
When I have a problem, it will gnaw on my mind for a long time.			
I tend to replay past events as I would have liked them to happen.			
I find myself daydreaming about things I wish I had done.			
When trying to solve a complicated problem I find that I just keep coming back to the beginning without ever finding a solution			
It is very difficult for me to come to a clear conclusion about some problems, no matter how much I think about it			
Perceived Ethical Care (Thompson & Siamagka, 2021)	0.88	0.91	0.69
Social network (SN) sites devote every effort to help its customers feel more comfortable when sharing their personal information online			
SN sites truly cares about how the customers feel about sharing their personal information			
SN sites listen carefully to its customers' concerns about their privacy online			
Social network sites share information of what is done to protect the online personal information of its users.			
SN sites communicate regularly with customers about privacy issues online			

APPENDIX: B

Social Isolation Manipulation (Study 1)

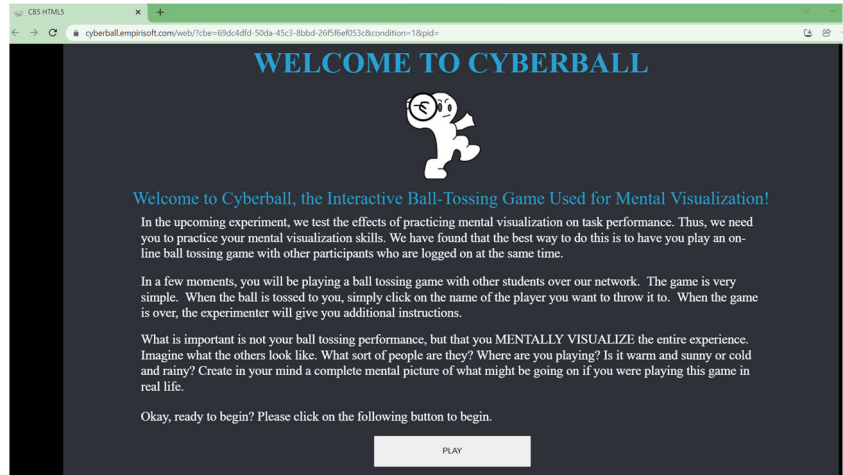
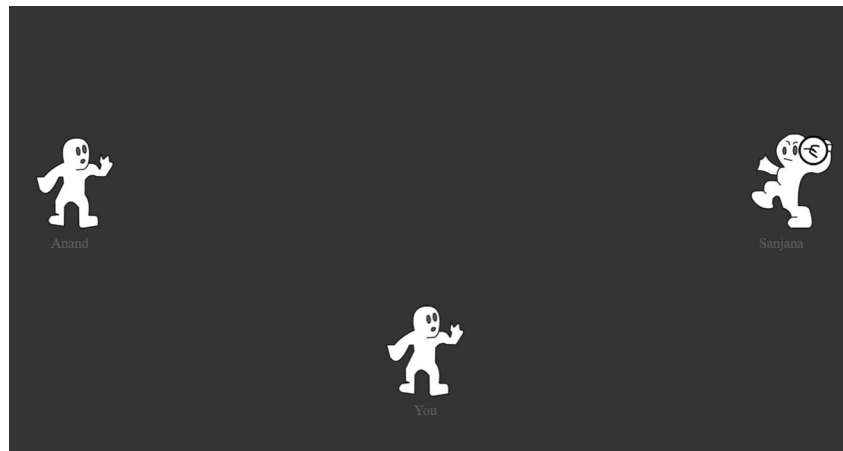
High social isolation

<https://cyberball.empirisoft.com/web/?cbe=5942c61b-0f01-4f57-b441-961704c74de4&condition=1&pid=>

Low social isolation

<https://cyberball.empirisoft.com/web/?cbe=69dc4dfd-50da-45c3-8bbd-26f5f6ef053c&condition=1&pid=>

Screenshots of the Cyberball game used for manipulating social Isolation

(a) How the game appears in the browser**(b) How the game looks while the participant is playing**

APPENDIX: C

Social Anxiety Manipulation (Study 1)

Low Social Anxiety

Please imagine a social situation in which you find it **easy and comfortable** mixing with and talking to people you don't know well. **You are not worried** about saying something embarrassing, not knowing what to say or expressing yourself.

Now, take a moment and try to get a visual image of this situation in your mind. What do you feel when you are in such a situation? How would you feel if you faced such a situation now? After the visualization, write a sentence or two about your thoughts and feelings regarding yourself in relation to this situation.

High Social Anxiety

Please imagine a social situation in which you find it **difficult and uncomfortable** mixing with and talking to people you don't know well. **You are worried** about saying something embarrassing, not knowing what to say or expressing yourself.

Now, take a moment and try to get a visual image of this situation in your mind. What do you feel when you are in such a situation? How would you feel if you faced such a situation now? After the visualization, write a sentence or two about your thoughts and feelings regarding yourself in relation to this situation.