

FOMO and social media addiction: A correlational study

Shaurya Barnwal¹, Dr. Shivali Sharma²

¹ Department of Applied Psychology, Amity Institute of Behavioral and Allied Science, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, India

² Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioral and Allied Science, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, India

Abstract

This study aimed to look at how Fear of Missing Out relates to media addiction among college and university students. A study that looked at connections was done with a group of 32 students who were easy to reach. There were 24 girls and 8 boys in the group. These students filled out the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale, which was created by researchers, and also a FOMO scale that was made by the researcher. The average age of the students who participated was 20.97 years old. A statistical test showed that higher levels of addiction led to more FOMO. The link was weak to medium in strength and statistically significant ($r = .36$, $p = .042$). The test showed that the FOMO was a predictor of social media addiction ($\beta = .43$, $p = .024$). At the same time, age and gender did not make much of a difference in the results. The FOMO was a predictor of social media addiction. Age and gender did not make much of a difference. The results did not show an effect of age or gender. The fear of missing out was a predictor. The test showed that. The results were clear. The fear of missing out was a predictor of social media addiction. The study found no strong overall link between the model and social media addiction $R^2 = .19$, $F(3,28) = 2.13$, $p = .119$. The paper then talks about how fear of missing out connects to social media use, along with the study's flaws and future research ideas.

Keywords: FOMO, fear of missing out, young adults, social media addiction, problematic social media use, correlational study

Introduction

Young people today are on social media every day of their lives. Their interactions with one another, their friendships, and establishing their identities are all influenced by social media as well. While social media has several very positive aspects, the fact that people talk to each other all the time leads to two major issues: The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social media addiction. The Fear of Missing Out refers to the discomfort individuals feel because they are afraid that other people are enjoying themselves and that they have not been invited. They also really want to know what others are doing. Social media addiction is when people use media too much, and it starts to hurt their daily life. This is yet another example of the problem created by bad habits. FOMO, short for 'fear of missing out, is a type of concern because it makes people believe that others are having better experiences than they are. They want to keep in touch with their acquaintances and get to know what is going on. Social media addiction can have an adverse impact on individuals, like other similar addictions have. It can stop them from doing things they need to do every day. Social media is a deal for young adults, and it is affecting their lives in many "ways. FOMO and social media addiction are two issues that are connected to social media. FOMO and social media addiction are" problems that people need to be aware of. The change has taken place rather rapidly. It is now almost twenty "years since internet services became an important part of everyday life, and of these, social networking sites (SNS) have become one of the most commonly used (Kang *et al.*, 2013) [15]. A social networking site is an online service which enables users to create a public or semi-public profile, to connect with other users, and to see the" networks that have been formed by the people those connections involve (Miller, 2020; Watermeyer, 2012) [23, 35]. Sites like

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter act as meeting places for communities united by shared interests and provide an excellent source for communication, self-expression, and identity development (Watermeyer, 2012) [35]. Because they are so widespread, people tend to continue using an SNS and often increase their level of involvement over time (Kang *et al.*, 2013) [15].

Alongside these positive aspects, numerous studies have linked heavy reliance on social networks to various adverse psychological outcomes such as feelings of anxiety, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, and "burnout (Krause *et al.*, 2021; Sun, 2023; Verduyn *et al.*, 2020; Zubair *et al.*, 2023; Weinstein, 2023) [17, 27, 33, 36, 38]. Moreover, frequent use of social networks is said to create information overload and reduce one's well-being (Matthes *et al.*, 2020) [22], as well as induce exhaustion related to social media usage, as noted by people feeling that they might be missing out on various life events, anxious and even depressed (Dhir *et al.*, 2018) [9]. University students seem to be especially susceptible: among this group, heavy users of social media report higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness (Sun, 2023) [27], together with disrupted sleep and poorer academic performance (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020) [26]. Since college is a vital stage during which long-term behavioural habits are established, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to excessive social media use among" this group (Wang *et al.*, 2021) [37].

FOMO is believed to have real effects on behaviour that go beyond the "social media platform itself; for example, Adams *et al.* (2017) [1] discovered that college students who scored high in FOMO were more likely to" text while driving, this seeming to indicate that they had difficulty putting their phones aside in situations that required full attention. FOMO can be increased merely by seeing a post

on a social connection's feed about an event that one did not attend (Fioravanti *et al.*, 2021; Yin *et al.*, 2021) ^[11, 37].

As greater numbers of college-aged people have adopted smartphones and social media, so too has the importance of both of these constructs increased, since this age group is particularly dependent on such platforms for social approval and to stay in contact with their peers (Wang *et al.*, 2021) ^[37]. Because of the increasing concern that has been expressed by researchers and mental health professionals regarding excessive reliance “on social media (Pontes *et al.*, 2018) ^[24], there have been calls for a clearer understanding of the connection between FOMO and social media addiction rather than viewing the two as merely loosely linked concepts (Masciantonio *et al.*, 2021) ^[21]. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the relationship between FOMO and social media addiction not only from a theoretical perspective but also in order to assist in the development of interventions that are intended to encourage healthier digital habits among students. This study's objective” is to examine this relationship directly among a group of Indian college and university students.

Rationale

Even though there is increasing academic interest in both concepts, researchers have on several occasions pointed out that the field does not yet have a clear framework connecting FOMO with social networking site (SNS) addiction, and that it is necessary “to carry out more research in order to understand why some users are particularly susceptible to FOMO and the subsequent addictive usage patterns (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Fioravanti *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2022). Andreassen” and Pallesen (2014) ^[5, 11, 19, 20] reached a similar conclusion, noting that since research into social networking addiction is still relatively new, the underlying factors causing it are not well understood and therefore further empirical investigation is required. Most of the existing research on FOMO has also been conducted in Western settings, so the nature of the relationship remains comparatively unexamined among South Asian student populations. As collectivistic cultural environments may intensify the emotional effects of social exclusion and comparison (Triandis, 1995) ^[32], looking at this relationship in a sample of Indian students provides valuable contextual insight. This study tackles these shortcomings by empirically testing “association between FOMO and social media addiction among a group of Indian college and university students, the majority of” whom are studying programmes related to psychology.

Review of Literature

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO is a relatively recent phenomenon coming to prominence with the appearance of social media. Przybylski *et al.* (2013) ^[25] define it as the fear of missing “out on rewarding experiences available to others,” with the associated feeling of “compulsive need to stay connected.” These two aspects together “constitute the construct of FOMO” (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). In turn, Tandon *et al.* (2021a) ^[14], in their scoping review of the literature, provide a more detailed definition, arguing that FOMO encompasses “anxiety and concern that one is missing out on information or events taking place on social networking sites and further proposed a conceptual framework that may inform future studies on FOMO.” The review identified the key

characteristics of the FOMO construct, with which it is associated, as “the unwillingness to miss out on information and events and the subsequent unease and concern about failing to do so.” Then, considering the relationships of FOMO with psychological factors, Gupta & Sharma (2021) ^[14] in their umbrella review conclude “that higher levels of FOMO were linked to greater dissatisfaction with fundamental human needs, higher levels of loneliness, low self-esteem, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms.” The same article, in addition, discusses a conceptual analysis of FOMO by Tanhan *et al.* (2022) ^[31].

Studies in the area of FOMO also focus on some of the dysfunctional behaviors associated with it. Notably, in their survey of college freshmen, Adams *et al.* (2017) ^[1] find that “FOMO predicted intentions to engage in texting while driving” as another manifestation of this phenomenon beyond its effect on the use of social networks. Tandon *et al.* (2021b) ^[37] identify “stalking on social media, increased social comparison tendencies, and digital fatigue” as some of the consequences of FOMO. Moreover, the same team reports in the second study (Tandon *et al.*, 2022) ^[30] that FOMO is also associated with “phubbing (snubbing someone in favor of a phone) and a range of other psychological and interpersonal effects.”

Fioravanti *et al.* (2021) ^[11] demonstrate that “fear of missing out (FOMO) is positively correlated with both the frequency and dysfunctional use of social networking sites. A meta-analysis has verified that compulsive, problematic engagement patterns are directly correlated with elevated levels of FOMO. This is the sole research that evaluates the direct relationship between FOMO and social media addiction, as it focuses on this specific topic. Elhai *et al.* (2020) ^[10] refer to the fear of missing out (FOMO) as a psychological dependency” that motivates dysfunctional, toxic technology usage. This viewpoint portrays the digital habit as an addictive behavior that results in detrimental device dependence. This article emphasizes the influence of FOMO on the development of unhealthy technology usage patterns in general. Li *et al.* (2022) employed network analysis with Chinese college students to demonstrate that FOMO is a critical factor in the development of smartphone addiction and the use of social media. This demonstrates that FOMO is the primary fundamental driver of overall technology addiction.

Social Media Addiction

Social media addiction is a kind of addiction that people are talking about a lot. It is also called “social media use”. This shows that people consume too much media and it is starting to influence their lives. The consequences of “addiction to social media may include the need to constantly” check one's social networking profiles or to resort to the media as an escape from their feelings. They might also feel bad when they cannot use media. Some researchers have tried to understand why people get addicted to media. They found that there are six things that can happen to “people who are addicted. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale is the name given to these items. This scale was employed by the researchers to determine media addiction. Studies on social media addiction have been” conducted. Some of these studies have looked at who's most likely to get addicted. Others have looked at the problems that can happen when people are addicted. For instance, some people think that social media addiction is

not a thing. They think that people are just using media too much. Other researchers have tried to figure out why people cannot stop using media. They found that some people use media because they are thinking about things too much. They might also use media because they have mental health problems. A number of individuals engage with media since they desire to fit in with others and enjoy the sense of community. Companies working in social media help in creating an addiction among the consumers. They have things like scrolling, likes, and comments. These things can make people feel like they need to keep using media. Even though there has been a lot of research on social media addiction, there is still a lot that we do not know. We do not know why some people get addicted, and others do not. We do not know how to help people who're addicted. Scientists are studying various aspects of social media addiction for finding out more about it. Their aim is to understand how people get addicted to social media and what can be done to help them. They have taken into consideration different factors like fear of missing out, which makes people believe that they have to constantly monitor their social media accounts. It is undeniable that social media addiction is problematic, and it requires extensive research.

Theoretical Framework

The current research has used two models to support the study. The first model is “Self-Determination Theory, which looks at how autonomy, competence and relatedness affect wellbeing. This theory says that when people have these needs met, they are less likely to” feel the need to check media constantly. According to some studies, when people feel they lack autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they become anxious about missing out, a phenomenon known as FOMO. Research conducted by Przybylski *et al.* in 2013^[25] revealed that individuals who have a positive self-image and interpersonal relationships are less likely to experience what is termed “FOMO” (fear of missing out) or “engage in excessive social media use. Similarly, Beyens *et al.*, in 2016^[6] discovered that adolescents who perceive themselves as less popular or socially accepted exhibit a tendency to feel FOMO more often and engage in media utilization frequently. The other model used in this study is the Components Model of Addiction by Griffiths. This model says that” addiction is a behaviour that has parts, including how much something matters to you, how it makes you feel and whether you can stop doing it or not. By using these two models, we can see that when people have unmet needs, they are more likely to feel FOMO, and this might result in checking social media too much, which is a sign of social media addiction.

Correlation

The connection between “Fear of Missing Out and media addiction” is a big circle. When you use media a lot, you see more things that make you feel like you are missing out. This is what FOMO is. FOMO makes you want to use media even more to feel better. Some people did a study to see how this works. They found out that when you see things on social media that make you feel jealous, it makes you want to use social media more. If you really want to belong to a group, you will feel FOMO and use social media more. So, when you use media a lot, you feel like you are missing out, and that makes you use social media even more to feel okay. This is, like, what some other people found out

when they studied “how FOMO and social media addiction are connected to using smartphones. FOMO and social media addiction are connected in a circle. When you use media, you feel Fear of Missing Out, and that makes you use social media” more.

Hypothesis

H1: “There will be a statistically significant positive correlation between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social media addiction among college and university” students.

Methodology

Participants

The sample “involved 32 students attending the college and university (24 females and 8 males) and was between 18 and 24 years old ($M = 20.97$, $SD = 1.38$). The majority” of respondents were undergraduate students ($n = 28$), while the rest attended postgraduate programs ($n = 4$). Most respondents studied Psychology (Applied Psychology, BA Psychology), while the rest were Law, Medicine, Engineering, and Agriculture students. Respondents were recruited employing a convenience sampling method and posted recruitment ads on social media.

Instruments

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was assessed using a 17-item scale that was developed by the researcher in accordance with the conceptual definition provided “by Przybylski *et al.* (2013)^[25]. The items were created in accordance with the primary domains of FOMO: the consequences of missing out and social concerns. Using a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), each participant was required to designate their level of agreement with each” corresponding item. An example of the items includes “I feel sad for myself when I miss events/opportunities”. Additionally, an example of the items includes “I feel deeply lonely when my friends go out, go to a social event, etc.” The “score for each participant has been determined by summing up the scores for all items, with higher scores indicating” increased levels of FOMO. Since the scale used had not been previously validated by the researchers, this study’s findings cannot be generalized because it lacks reliability and validity. Additionally, FOMO was operationalised based on the concepts put forward by Przybylski *et al.* (2013)^[25].

The “Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS)” has been employed for assessing the variables under research. The self-reported 6-item BSMAS was created by Andreassen *et al.* (2016)^[4]. Every item on the BSMAS aligns with Griffiths's addiction model (2005)^[12], which addresses salience, tolerance, conflict, mood change, withdrawal, and relapse. In a 5-point response format, participants were requested to specify the frequency with which each addiction symptom impacted them, with a range of Very Rarely (1) to Very Often (5).

Procedure

We collected the study's information through an anonymous web survey made via Google Forms. After they read a short summary of the study, the participants agreed to take part. The questionnaire included items on basic personal details like age, gender, major, and education level, along with tests

for social media addiction and FOMO. To protect privacy, the responses were later stripped of names and email addresses. These details were only used to send out the survey.

Result Analysis

Prior to conducting any analysis, three item responses (out of 736 item responses) were found to contain invalid responses not corresponding to any of the response options (e.g., an accidentally selected response option). One respondent's item response was replaced by his or her mean score across items for the BSMAS. Similarly, two item responses were modified for the FOMO scale. The sum of each participant's item responses was subsequently utilized to determine their total scores (FOMO Total: Possible scores: 17 – 85; BSMAS Total: Possible scores: 6 – 30).

Assumption checks

Before proceeding to conducting parametric analyses, the distribution of data was assessed for Pearson's correlations and multiple regression analysis. Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed that both FOMO Total, $W = .976$, $p = .692$, and BSMAS Total, $W = .961$, $p = .289$, approximately follow a normal distribution. Both variables showed moderately positive skewness (0.30 for FOMO and 0.38 for BSMAS) and only mild negative kurtosis. The deviations from normal distribution were insufficient to require transformation of the data or using a non-parametric alternative of Pearson's r . A non-parametric Spearman correlation is reported below as a robustness check and produced similar estimates. All variables involved in the multiple regression analysis have pairwise correlations of less than .25 with each other. Specifically, there are no strong interrelationships between the predictor variables of FOMO Total, age, and gender. Thus, collinearity is not of concern in this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
FOMO Total	32	49.50	9.98	32	72	0.30
BSMAS Total	32	15.19	3.72	9	23	0.38

Correlational Analysis

A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated for FOMO Total scores and BSMAS Total scores to evaluate whether these variables are linearly related to each other. Results revealed a “positive relationship between these two variables, $r(30) = .36$, 95% CI [.02, .63], $p = .042$ (two-tailed). The coefficient of determination was .131, which means that the FOMO scores explained 13% of the variance in social media” addiction scores. There was a similar result when Spearman's rank-order correlation was applied, revealing that $r_s = .36$, $p = .044$. This result suggests that the initial finding was not dependent on the slight deviation from normality that was detected above. In other words, FOMO scores were positively correlated with social media addiction scores, providing partial support for Hypothesis 1. From the perspective of effect sizes, this finding might be regarded as moderate as per Cohen's guidelines (1988). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the 95% CI for this estimate is ranges from a small to a large effect size. It is “due to relatively small sample size that reduces the

precision of the” estimation, which should be considered when interpreting the result.

	FOMO Total	BSMAS Total
FOMO Total	-	$r = .36$, $p = .042^*$
BSMAS Total	$r = .36$, $p = .042^*$	-

* $p < .05$

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis has been undertaken with BSMAS Total as the outcome variable and FOMO Total, Age, and Gender (1 = male, 0 = female) as the predictor variables to see if FOMO predicted social media addiction after correcting for confounding variables. Results demonstrate that this model was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .19$, Adjusted $R^2 = .10$, $F(3, 28) = 2.13$, $p = .119$). This indicates that the predictor variables aided for only about 19% of the variance in social media addiction scores, which was not enough to claim a significant proportion of variance explained. Nevertheless, the main effect of FOMO Total was found to be statistically significant within this model, $\beta = .43$, $t(28) = 2.39$, $p = .024$. For reference, one-point increase in FOMO Total score predicted a .16-point increase in BSMAS Total score after controlling for age and gender, while Age, $\beta = .22$, $t(28) = 1.73$, $p = .220$ and Gender, $\beta = -.07$, $t(28) = -.16$, $p = .688$, were found to be non-significant predictors.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-4.96	11.07	-	-0.45	.657
FOMO total	0.16	0.07	.43	2.39	.024*
Age	0.59	0.47	.22	1.26	.220
Gender(1=Male)	-0.60	1.49	-.07	-0.41	.688

Note. DV = BSMAS Total. $R^2 = .19$, $F(3, 28) = 2.13$, $p = .119$. * $p < .05$

Discussion

The “main finding of the present research was that fear of missing out (FOMO) was positively correlated with social media addiction scores in college and university students. This conclusion” supports the initial speculation of this paper that FOMO drives social media usage beyond reasonable levels “to the point of addiction (Brown *et al.*, 2020^[23]; Li *et al.*, 2023). One explanation for this phenomenon is that people with high FOMO might use social media as a coping strategy for their FOMO. In other words, FOMO can motivate individuals to engage in compulsive social media use in an effort to alleviate their” FOMO symptoms (Przybylski *et al.*, 2013)^[25].

It is noteworthy that the current study did not confirm the predictions regarding age and gender. While the inclusion of these predictors slightly improved the values for the regression model, the model as a whole was not significant. The results can be “attributed to the study's relatively small sample size” of 32 participants. As such, only one individual predictor, FOMO, was significant, whereas the other predictors were not, which is not uncommon for regression analyses with small samples. Notably, gender predicted social media addiction scores in the expected direction. To be more specific, males scored lower on social media addiction measures than “females, which aligns with previous research that has suggested that females are generally more at risk for social media addiction than males.

Nevertheless, the present research did not demonstrate that age was a significant” predictor.

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Conclusion

The findings of the research demonstrated a correlation between social media addiction and FOMO among college and university students. Higher FOMO levels were linked to worse results on too much use measures, $r(30) = .36, p = .042$. Thus, the study’s results validate Hypothesis 1. The results further demonstrate that, in a multiple regression “that considered the effects of age and gender, the FOMO score was a sign of social media addiction ($\beta = .43, p = .024$). The results imply that there was no relationship between FOMO and social media addiction.

The findings of the study add to theory by supporting the idea that FOMO acts as a middle factor in the link between personal needs and social media addiction. This idea was introduced by researchers like Deci and Ryan (1985) [8]. Then developed by Beyens *et al.* (2016) [6]. The overall research findings therefore show that FOMO is a psychological issue that should be considered when looking at how social media affects behavior. By using the results of studies on the topic (Fioravanti *et al.*, 2021; Tandon *et al.*, 2021a; Yin *et al.*, 2021) [11, 37], the current research” shows the possible effect of FOMO in Indian students, who are being studied for the first time in this area. The real-world meaning of the study is about the need to tell the difference between FOMO and general social media use when trying to lower student addiction to media. Dealing with FOMO directly might be better for student social media use than focusing on the use itself.

Future Implications

Future studies need to have more diverse groups of people to make the results stronger and more accurate for everyone. The data we got was very close to being important but not quite, which means a larger group of people could make the results official. This will make the final conclusions more useful for a lot of people. Second, because this study only looked at one point in time, future tests should look at things over a period of time and do experiments to see how FOMO, utilising social media, age and gender affect each other. We need to understand how FOMO and addictive behavior are connected. This connection can go one way, where FOMO leads to addiction. It can also go both ways, where each habit makes the other stronger.

The third thing we think is important is the tool employed for measuring FOMO in the people who took part in the study. Future researchers should try to make sure the tool used in this study is good or use a tool that has been tested, like the one used by Przybylski and colleagues in 2013 [25].

Compare this study’s findings with previous research. Fourth, we must investigate the relationship between social media addiction and FOMO. Some researchers, like Yin and colleagues, found that feelings like envy, loneliness and the desire to fit in help explain this connection. They also found that the type of person and the type of social media platform can change how strong this effect is, which means there is more to study. Similarly, examining the influence of social media addiction and FOMO on individuals in various cultures could provide us with additional insights. The majority of the research conducted thus far has involved individuals from non-Indian cultures; however, cultural distinctions can influence the strength of the correlation between social media addiction and FOMO. This may offer an explanation for the fact that FOMO is more prevalent in certain cultures than in others. Lastly the results of this study can help organizations understand how to stop media addiction from happening. Instead of just limiting screen time, companies can try other ways to reduce fear of missing out, like using a program that helps people be more mindful when they use social media, which can help reduce social anxiety and loneliness.

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