

## Impact of Social Media and Fear of Missing Out

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### ABSTRACT

Social media is like a black hole, once you enter, there's no coming back. Over the recent times it has become overly dependent on the usage of social media. The way it keeps us engaged has been properly strategized by the algorithms to keep us hooked and hence making the whole concept of social media profitable to its makers. Technology was always made to make our routines easier, instead we've unnecessarily made ourselves busier. Lurking through social media all day long and looking at what others are doing makes us feel as if we are not living our lives fancy enough to be happy about, due to which social media is creating fear of missing out. Fear of missing out is a state where a person constantly feels that something is left out from his/her routine, as if others are having more exciting lives, and are living a more happening life as compared to theirs. Fear of missing out is most triggered with problematic usage of social media. Over the recent past times it has been analysed that smartphone usage has increased multifold, which is more or less all about social media. It is better to nip the evil in the bud. It is advised to take precautionary measures before you start to fall prey to social media and fear of missing out. A little effort done every day can make us feel grounded with the real-life picture, for example, taking regular detox from social media, continuing journaling, keeping up with gratitude journaling so that we are thankful for what we have.

**Keywords:** *Social media, Fear of missing out, Problematic smartphone usage*

*"Social media is not a media. The key is to listen, engage, and build relationships" well, that's what David Alston said.*

Social media, a tool which was made to connect people over the globe, to facilitate easy access to what people are doing sitting across the countries. It hasn't been long since we started to breathe social media. In a study report done by Smith & Page (2015), social media usage among 65 years old and above has increased triple fold since 2010 when only 10% people used social media. Whereas young adults ranging from ages 18 to 29 are most likely to use social media, almost 90% of them do. From the data taken from Pew Research Centre (2015) it would be easier for us to make a conclusion that the rate of social media usage is exponentially increasing irrespective of the age groups. It would be pretty genuine to state here that social media is not just any trend that youth follows, instead it's a habit that prevails for the entire population.

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### *Social Media*

Social media is not just any mode of connection now, rather has become our mode of survival now. Try keeping us without being in touch with Facebook, twitter or Instagram; it feels like a fish has been kept without water. The growth social media has witnessed is unparalleled to any other growth. The makers of all the applications are well aware of the working of algorithms and work with the main purpose of keeping the people hooked to their sites, which is the major reason we fall prey to the black hole of social media.

Social Media has become a platform for companies to engage people. Now, it has become the biggest tool for companies and brands to reach the masses which has led to the emergence of yet another concept of social media marketing. Gone are the days for traditionally marketing your brand, now it's all about social media that connects people with emotional appeal. In a study done by Padival (2019) found out that creativity and informativeness had quite an influence on the consumers for social media advertisements. Conveniently we have become slaves of it.

An application which has been basically designed to stay in touch with everyone, has now become a place for everything, from keeping updates on each other's life to spreading knowledge and rumors to showcasing talents and interests, social media is the place.

There is an overload of information that can severely affect the mental well-being causing mental fatigue and energy drainage. Relevant study was done by Dhir (2018), the findings of the study suggested that using social media compulsively resulted in social media fatigue. It was also found that social media fatigue later led to increased anxiety and depression levels.

It is quite normal to be drowned in the sea of social networks and later feel overwhelmed with so many emotions. Amongst all the emotions anxiety and depressed states turn out to be most common. More the time spent on using social media, greater symptoms of dispositional anxiety which was pretty evident in a study by Vannucci (2017). The pattern of excessive social media usage and depression is significant in all age groups.

Along with the symptoms of psychological distress, it instils a sense of being in a competition. No matter how much a person might have achieved, there will always be this feeling that something major is still missing and that feeling is called fear of missing out. It's a state where the person feels that he/she might not be living as exciting and happy life as everyone else is. Mostly the fear of missing out is related to social media consumption. Beyens (2016) in a study revealed that stress relating to Facebook use increased fear of missing out (FoMO). Fear of missing out sets the life of people in autopilot mode, due to which they are constantly working and making themselves uncomfortable in their own skin. In the study conducted by Fardouly (2016) revealed that body image concerns among young men and women are mostly associated with social media usage, particularly Facebook, it is also suggested that in a longitudinal study the relation between the Facebook and body image issues may strengthen.

In a virtual world of relations and friendships, real bonds are least cherished. Thousands of friends and followers and not having even a single real relation is a trend of this generation. In times of crisis where the human buffer can heal the pain, this generation feels so lonely because of the superficial bonds they have created their whole life. Lonely children and adolescents use online mode to communicate their personal and intimate feelings than those who are not lonely (Bonetti, 2010). A representative survey of the U.S. on the adolescents,

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threw light on the relationship between screen time and suicidal ideation. It was found that children who spent more time off screen were less likely to report mental health issues as compared to the children who spent more time on screen (includes social media and smartphone usage) (Twenge, 2017). Virtual world does not really suffice the need for real communications and connections.

Recent studies have always tried to link the effect of social media usage to self esteem. When people are constantly comparing themselves with deceptive photos and tweets of other people's life, they tend to look down upon themselves which is then reflected in their self esteems. Lower levels of self esteem make them feel unworthy about themselves. In a study by Jan (2017) it was proved that there is a strong correlation between social media and self esteem. The relation between them came out to be a negative correlation. As social media usage increases, it causes self- esteem to decrease. If we talk about the exact consensus then, one hour spent on Facebook daily resulted in a 5.57 decrease in scores of self-esteem of an individual. It won't be ingenuine to state here that we have turned out to be mere puppets of this trend of keeping people updated about our normal routines and making the basic things so fancy and exotic, even if that might not be the absolute reality.

### *Fear of Missing Out*

Among all the causes of social media, the one which has set a hashtag trend among the youth is Fear of Missing Out (#fomo), anything that they can not do in the moment, they start feeling fomo and that's how it is such a trending hashtag because no matter how much one tries to do everything and be everywhere, something or the other would still be left undone, hence experiencing #fomo.

It is a comparatively recent term which came into existence in 1996 by Dr. Herman. It is a feeling or perception that everyone else is having a better and happier life because of all the photos and tweets on their social platforms. It is like a bug in the cognitive processes that feeds the person about all the things he/she is not being able to do and all the amazing experiences they have yet not experienced which makes them realise that there is something fundamentally important that is missing while others in their friend list are experiencing that.

In a recent study it was demonstrated that problematic smartphone usage and social smartphone use are major contributors for fear of missing out as compared with negative affect and fears of negative and positive evaluations (Wolniewicz, 2018)

Social media has set up a new trend of phubbing. Phubbing is the term used when people ignore someone, they are with but instead pay attention to their phones. It is more like giving favour to your phone than the human company you are with. Al- Saggaf (2020) did a study to find relation between phubbing, fear of missing out and boredom and found out that FoMO was used as an excuse to phub so as to avoid the feeling of boredom. It's like you surf because you feel FoMO and then you feel FoMO because of compulsive scrolling. This vivacious cycle seems to continue causing mental distress.

It has been studied that social media engagement and anxiety and stress are being mediated by FoMO. On the contrary FoMO was not a contributor between the relationship of social media and depression and academic motivation (McAndrew, 2018). Dempsey (2019) clarified that Facebook Use frequency was related to problematic Facebook use severity. Also, social anxiety and compulsive Facebook use were mediated by fear of missing out and

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rumination. In yet another similar study Shensa et al, (2017) it was explained how we use social media is a problematic behavior and not how much we use it. There was a prominent relationship between social media use and depressive symptoms because of problematic use behaviors.

Need to belong is quite high in adolescents. They want to be part of the group and not left out and ganged up upon. So, they try to imitate and follow the peer culture but that might not be the most sane thing to do. So, when they fail to be part of the group, they switch to the virtual world which feels like a safe place to make friends and start conversations, leading to social media addictions. In a study by Fabris (2020) it was concluded that FoMO was associated with decreased levels of emotional well-being in adolescents. There was also a negative relation found between neglect by online peers and higher sensitivity to stress which was a trigger for social media addiction. When they feel abandoned by their virtual group as well, it can act as a serious hit to their mental health.

Due to this pathological internet use behavior addictions have been noticed which seem to affect the work culture as well. A study done on Germans by Rozgonjuk (2020) predicted strong positive correlation between FoMO and social networks use disorder, along with that it had a negative impact on productivity at work and regular functioning of life.

Constant buzzing of notifications from Instagram, Whatsapp, Snapchat, etc keep distracting the majority from the major focus at their work stations and once the person decides to take a quick sneak peek into other peoples' life updates; minutes and hours are lost in seconds. This whole dark circle leads to work stress when deadlines are not met. Not just stress but jealousy is a common outcome of social media and FoMO. People don't understand that these platforms are merely for bragging. It's a space where literally everything and anything can be bragged about. From the place where you ate to the parties you went to and also, happiness seems to be bragged and exaggerated. Thinking how happy other people look on Instagram and Facebook, envy seems to be one of the many negative human emotions. A study concluded that problematic smartphone use was positively correlated with envy and this relation was mediated by fear of missing out (Wang, 2019)

As such there is no gender difference as such in experiencing FoMO but the younger population surely have higher rates for the same (Rozgonjuk, 2021). But if we consider the age groups then youth is being influenced by everything that might be trending on the social media platforms and they try to mimic the lifestyles of influencers and the popular ones because of which sense of normality becomes skewed. This affects their mental status which further affects their physical state. The amount of time you spend on social media is directly related to FoMO. Also, people who are facing FoMO are more likely to showcase less mindfulness, more physical symptoms and high state of depression (Baker, 2016).

After some point in life, fear of missing out starts to become a learned trait of helplessness. People start to feel as if their life is no more in control and nothing can be done to make it any more happening or happy. People who constantly feel FoMO do not realise that everyone on social media is focused on posting and tweeting positive, happy and exuberant experiences, which portrays quite a magnificent picture about them but no one really cares to showcase the negative experiences or the lows they might have faced in the journey of life. All these instances then take a toll on mental well-being when people start to think that success is so easy to get and they are the only ones deprived of that happiness.

### CONCLUSION

Over the time social media has taken up all our time for recreational activities. Our personalities are severely distorted because we constantly try to be someone else and do something that is more trendy. Our whole identities seemed to be flawed. And it is not like the people don't recognize what social media is doing to them, they do acknowledge the fact that it makes them more anxious and depressed. They also realise that they are distracted and have smaller attention spans than ever. Fear of missing out happens to be the most disturbing consequence of problematic smartphone use as we stop looking at what we have but focus mostly on what we are missing out on which disturbs our whole mental well-being.

There have been a few interventions and researches which work on grounding the humans who might feel overwhelmed with social media usage. If quitting social media doesn't sound like a plan then limiting its use can really prove to be helpful. Limiting social media usage to 30 minutes per day can lead to prominent changes in well-being (Hunt, 2018). Keep track of your emotions in writing as you feel FoMO can be one of the resorts to hold on to your emotions and not get carried away with them. In the digital worlds where everything happens over social networks, it won't be exactly a practical idea to quit social media, but you can surely go on regular digital detoxes to keep your mind sane and functional. Switch off your mobile phones over the weekends or simply uninstall them for two three days, take time to get back to the things that you might have been wanting to do. Try to keep a gratitude journal. Rather than constantly feeling as if something or the other is missing out, be there in the moment and try to be thankful for what you have in the moment. This activity really gives a ground to stand on and see things through a different perspective. Let social media be a source to connect with people and not make it a device to disconnect us from ourselves.

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