Research Paper

Social Media Use, Fear of Missing Out and Psychological Wellbeing Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to assess the relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults. The study also assesses whether there are significant differences in gender with respect to social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing. A sample of 230 young adults (115 males, 115 females) aged between 17-22 years participated in the study. Social Media Addiction Scale-Student form (SMAS-SF) by Sahin (2018), Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO) by Przybylski (2013), Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB) by Ryff (1989) were used to measure the variables in the study. Pearson's correlation coefficient and independent sample t-test were used for statistical analysis of data. The findings indicated that social media use was positively correlated to fear of missing out and negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing; while psychological wellbeing was negatively correlated to fear of missing out. There was no significant gender difference in social media use and psychological wellbeing; while there was a significant gender difference in fear of missing out, with males having higher levels of fear of missing out in comparison to females. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: *Social Media Use, Fear of Missing Out, Psychological Wellbeing, Young Adults*

Adulthood being a time for remarkable growth and transformation; is also a challenging period leading to mental health concerns. Individuals aged 18-25 need more amenities and care as they set in to the adult-world (Sapien Labs, 2020). According to the National Institute of Mental Health reports (2017), Mental health concerns are more prevalent in young adults than the elderly. As young adults begin to navigate the complexities of becoming independent individuals, they are faced with a multitude of psychosocial challenges. This includes the need to establish a strong sense of self-identity, form intimate relationships, and find a sense of purpose in life. Young adults are often faced with additional stressors, such as academic or career pressures, financial stresses, and modern society's demands. In recent years, the rise of social media has added a new layer to these challenges. Social media has become an integral part of the lives of many young adults, providing a platform for communication, entertainment, and self-expression.

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The emerging interactive technologies have revolutionized the way we connect with others and share information. Social media platforms facilitate the creation and sharing of ideas, interests, and other forms of expression with virtual communities. Social websites have rapidly evolved from a niche interest to a pervasive presence in the lives of billions of people worldwide. From early platforms like Myspace to current dominant players such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat social media have transformed the way we communicate, connect, and consume information. This growth has been driven by factors such as the widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile devices and the increasing importance of social connection in our daily lives. Social media platforms have become essential tools for building and maintaining relationships, as well as for sharing news, opinions, and experiences, making them appealing to younger generations, who view social media as an integral part of their daily routine. On the flip side, social media use has raised a number of psychosocial concerns and torpid behavior in young adults. Social networking websites have been linked to decreased self-esteem, poor sleep quality, social isolation and depression among adolescents (Baltaci, 2019; Hand et al, 2020; Shim, 2007; Woods et al, 2016). According to Griffiths, Kuss & Demetrovics (2014), persistent and habitual use of social networks may lead to difficulties in community based and personal areas of an individual including social, academics and work-related issues.

Turnel and Serenko (2012) have identified three distinct perspectives that explain the development of social network dependence: i) The cognitive-behavioral model emphasizes that "abnormal" social networking arises from maladaptive thinking which is reinforced by various environmental factors, gradually leading to social media dependency. ii) The social skills model suggests that "abnormal" social networking arises because individuals lack self-presentation skills and prefer virtual communication over face-to-face interactions, leading to compulsive and/or addictive social networking behavior. iii) the socio-cognitive model highlights that "abnormal" social networking arises from the expectation of positive outcomes, clubbed with internet self-efficacy and inadequate self-regulation, which lead to habit forming on social network use (Griffiths, 2013).

Xu and Tan (2012) suggest that individuals may turn to social media as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress, loneliness, or depression, leading to increased social media use. However, this can lead to various problems and deplete an individual's mental state. Further, social media use in young people can lead to harmful behaviors such as aggression, personality disorder, unhealthy diet, early sexuality, tobacco and alcohol use. Also, the repeated use can develop into psychological dependence on social sharing, where in the individual repeats the behaviour in an attempt to alleviate unwanted moods associated with social media use (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Many research studies have linked social media usage with psychological wellbeing and reported that; the increase in the use of social media lead to poor psychological wellbeing and lower levels of mental wellness (Mishra, 2022; Rae & Lonborg, 2015). According to Sabik et al., (2020), women who get their sense of self-worth from comments on social media show decreased levels of psychological wellness, resilience, self-kindness and increased levels of stress and depressive symptoms. Also, excessive use of social media lead to social media fatigue, which in turn lead to increase in anxiety, depression and lower psychological wellbeing among social media users (Dhir et al., 2018). Conversely, a few studies also report social media use to have a positive impact on overall wellbeing and is an indicator of happiness, psychological wellbeing, and life satisfaction (Doğan, 2019; Upadhayay, 2018). Further, some studies have reported a positive correlation between social

media use and psychological wellbeing, when primarily used for connecting with friends and bridging the social capital (Liu et al., 2019; Ostic et al., 2021).

The rise of social media has led to a constant stream of information about the experiences of one's peers, resulting in the emergence of a new phenomenon known as the fear of missing out (FOMO), which refers to a feeling of anxiety or unease that one might miss an interesting or exciting event, opportunity, or experience, particularly when seeing others post about it on social media. It is further characterized by a constant worry of being absent from enjoyable experiences and activities happening around oneself, and is defined as a pervasive anxiety that results from the desire to remain continually connected with others' experiences and activities. Research has shown that FOMO is commonly observed in younger individuals; particularly males and is associated with decreased life fulfillment, declining mood, and unfavorable experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013). The desire to be adored and popular along with excessive use of Instagram and phubbing behavior are associated with fear of missing out tendencies (Balta et al., 2018). Besides, fear of missing out motivates intense social media use which has a negative impact on one's wellbeing if used excessively (Ainiyah at el., 2022; Dossey, 2014; Purba et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2020). According to O'Connell (2020), fear of missing out has strong connection to depression, addiction to smartphones, anxiety, mindfulness, and overall psychological wellbeing.

Thus, usage of social media platforms and fear of missing out being important contributors to the psychological wellbeing in young adults, the present study attempts to understand the relationship between the three variables which may further assist social media users to make informed decisions about their use and promote positive mental health. The study also assesses gender difference between social media addiction, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing which will enable in comprehending the gender proportion in the experience of the three variables.

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions.

Research questions
- Is there a relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults?
- Do males and females differ in their social media use?
- Do males and females differ in their fear of missing out?
- Do male and female social media users differ in their psychological wellbeing?

Objectives
- To study the relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults.
- To study the difference between males and females in their social media use.
- To study the difference between males and females in their fear of missing out.
- To study the difference between male and female social media users in their psychological wellbeing.

Hypotheses
- $H_0 1$: There is no significant relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

- $H_0 2$: There is no significant difference between males and females in their social media use.
- $H_0 3$: There is no significant difference between males and females in their fear of missing of out.
- $H_0 4$: There is no significant difference between male and female social media users in their psychological wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey method for data collection to study the relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults. The sample consisted of 230 participants aged between 17-22 years (115males and 115 females). The data was collected using convenient sampling technique.

Tools Used

- **Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO):** Fear of missing out was measured using the 10-item Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO) developed by Przybylski (2013). The scale is a one-factor ten-item self-report measurement. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all true (1) to absolutely true (5). The reliability co-efficient of the scale is .90.
- **Psychological wellbeing Scale (PWB):** Psychological Wellbeing was measured using the 42-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB), developed by Ryff (1989), which assesses six aspects of wellbeing and happiness, including: i) autonomy, ii) environmental mastery, iii) personal growth, iv) positive relations with others, v) purpose in life, and vi) self-acceptance. The scale includes both positively and negatively worded items and respondents rate their level of agreement using a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was found to range from .93 to .86 and the test-retest reliability was found to range from .88 to .81.
- **Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMA-SF):** The social media use was measured by Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMA-SF), developed by Sahin (2018), which is a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). It is designed to assess social media use and addiction among students. The scale consists of 29 positively-worded items, organized into four factors: i) virtual tolerance, ii) virtual communication, iii) virtual problem, and iv) virtual information. The scale has an internal consistency of 0.93 and test-retest reliability of 0.94.

Statistical Analysis

The results were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. IBM SPSS-2.0 was used for data analysis. Among descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were used; among the inferential statistics independent sample t-test and Pearson's correlation method was used to test the hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are discussed hypothesis-wise as follows.

$H_0 1$: There is no significant relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation between social media use, psychological wellbeing and fear of missing out among young adults

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3
Social Media Use	230	75.71	18.05	-	.53**	-.34**
Fear of Missing Out		22.46	8.23	.53**	-	-.37**
Psychological wellbeing		168.88	27.29	-.34**	-.37**	-

**p< 0.01 level (2-tailed)

An analysis of Table 1 shows the mean score for social media use is 76.71, fear of missing out is 22.46 and psychological wellbeing is 168.88. In terms of standard deviation, the score for social media use is 18.05, fear of missing out is 8.23 and psychological wellbeing is 27.29. It means that the spread of scores away from mean is apparently more for psychological wellbeing, suggesting that there is more variation for psychological wellbeing among young adults. To see whether there is a relationship between the three variables, the scores were subject to Pearson's correlation co-efficient. The results yielded a strong positive correlation (*r=.53)* for *social media use and fear of missing out* which is significant at 0.01 level, which indicates that, as social media use increase fear of missing out also increases and an increased experience of fear of missing out will lead to an increased use of social media. A moderate negative correlation for *social media use and psychological wellbeing (r =-.34)* which is significant at 0.01 level, which indicates that, as social media use increases, psychological wellbeing decreases and decrease in social media use will further increase the psychological wellbeing. A moderate negative correlation for *fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing (r=-.37)* which is statistically significant at 0.01 level, indicating that individuals who experience an increase in fear of missing out show a decrease in psychological wellbeing and individuals who experience a decrease in fear of missing out show an increase in psychological wellbeing. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicated that there is a significant relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

The above results are consistent with the literature. Many studies have found a positive association between social media use and fear of missing out (Anwar et al., 2020; Bloemen & David De Coninck, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). A similar study conducted by Fabris et al., (2020), highlighted that fear of missing out is linked to increased sensitivity to stress due to negative experience with online peers and social media addiction. Mishra (2022), found that social media use is a strong predictor of psychological wellness, demonstrating a negative association between the two. Research has revealed that fear of missing out can significantly impact individuals' psychological wellbeing; further individuals who experience high levels of fear of missing out while using social media are likely to have lower levels of psychological wellbeing (Ainiyah et al., 2022; Purba et al., 2021). It was also found that the relationship between fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing was influenced by social media use (Arya et al., 2021).

On the contrary, many researchers have associated social media use with productive psychological outcomes; especially in terms of enhancing social connections, building one's self-esteem and reducing depression (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Deters & Mehl, 2013; Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007; Green-Hamann, Eichhorn, & Sherblom, 2011;) A similar study by Upadhayay (2018), found that using social media can have a positive impact on a person's overall wellbeing.

$H_0 2$: There is no significant difference between males and females in their social media use.

Table 2 Significance of difference between males and females in their social media use

Social Media Use	N	M	SD	t	p
Males	115	77.94	19.65	-1.88	.06*
Females	115	73.49	16.08		

*p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

An analysis of Table 2 shows the mean score for social media use is 77.94 for males and 73.49 for females, with corresponding standard deviation of 19.65 and 16.08, respectively. It means that spread of scores away from mean is more among males in comparison to females. To see whether the obtained mean difference is true of the population the scores were subjected to "*t*" test, The calculated "t" value for social media use between the two groups is -1.88, with a corresponding "p" value of .06, which is statistically not found to differ significantly. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significance difference between males and females in their social media use. The above results are consistent with the literature. Similar studies have shown that no significant differences exist between males and females in their social media use (Gerlich et al., 2010; Kirik et al., 2015).

$H_0 3$: There is no significant difference between males and females in their fear of missing of out.

Table 3 Significance of difference between males and females in their fear of missing out

Fear of missing out	N	M	SD	t	p
Males	115	23.75	8.68	-2.39	.01*
Females	115	21.17	7.58		

*p>0.05 level (2-tailed)

An analysis of Table 3 shows the mean score for social media use is 23.75 for males and 21.17 for females, with corresponding standard deviation of 8.68 and 7.58, respectively. It means that spread of scores away from mean is more among males in comparison to females. To see whether the obtained mean difference is true of the population the scores were subjected to "*t*" test, The calculated "t" value for fear of missing out between the two groups is -2.39, with a corresponding p-value of .01, which is statistically found to differ significantly. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significance difference between males and females in their psychological wellbeing.

The above results are consistent with the literature. According to Qutishabt (2020), there was a significant difference in fear of missing out experiences between males and females, where in the men experienced higher levels of fear of missing out in comparison to women. Another study by Anwar et al., (2020) also found that fear of missing out and social media intensity were more commonly experienced by males rather than females.

$H_0 4$: There is no significant difference between male and female social media users in their psychological wellbeing.

Table 4 Significance of difference between males and females in their psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing	N	M	SD	T	p
Males	115	166.70	28.99	.10	.22*
Females	115	171.05	25.43		

*p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

An analysis of Table 4 shows the mean score for social media use is 166.70 for males and 171.05 for females, with corresponding standard deviation of 28.99 and 25.43, respectively. It means that spread of scores away from mean is more among males in comparison to females. To see whether the obtained mean difference is true of the population the scores were subjected to "*t*" test, The calculated "t" value for social media use between the two groups is .10, with a corresponding "p" value of .22, which is statistically not found to differ significantly. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significance difference between males and females' social media users in their psychological wellbeing.

On contrary to the above results, Ali et al., (2022), found that the social media needs differ between males and females, as gender was found to have a considerable moderating impact on the association between social media needs and psychological wellbeing. Another study by Twenge et al., (2020) show that moderate or heavy digital media use and low psychological wellbeing were generally larger for girls than for boys.

CONCLUSION
The following conclusions are drawn based on the research questions raised.
- There is a significant relationship between social media use, fear of missing out and psychological wellbeing among adults.
- Males and females do not differ significantly in their social media use.
- Male and female social media users do not differ significantly in their psychological wellbeing.
- Males and females differ significantly in their fear of missing out, with males reporting higher levels of fear of missing out in comparison to females

Implications
The present study has important implications for understanding the potential negative impacts of social media use on psychological wellbeing, particularly in relation to fear of missing out. The findings of the study highlight the need for interventions aimed at promoting healthy social media habits and providing training resources to support individuals manage the negative effects of social media use. This includes encouraging individuals to use alternative non-digital resources for entertainment and information; motivating young adults for in-person communication and appreciating off-line interests among young adults. Further, psychoeducation to families, training on emotional regulation strategies and mindfulness based cognitive therapies can aid in alleviating social media use and fear of missing out.

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