

## Smartphone Use, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Connectedness among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to understand smartphone use, FOMO, and social connectedness among college students. The objective of the research is to understand the relationship between smartphone use, social connectedness and FOMO among the college students in the age category of 18 -25 and to find out if there are any gender differences among the students in the above-mentioned constructs. The study was conducted on 265 college students in India, predominantly in Kerala and Karnataka. Smartphone use scale by Ms. Shankhabela Mukherjee, Dr. Subrata Dasgupta (2020), FOMO scale by Przybylski et al., (2013) and social connectedness scale revised by Lee et al., (2001) was used. The study found out that there exists significant positive relationship between smartphone use and FOMO among college students. The study also found out significant negative relationship between social connectedness and FOMO and social connectedness and smartphone use.

**Keywords:** *Social connectedness, FOMO, Smartphone Use, College students*

The smartphone can be considered as one of the greatest technological inventions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the necessary devil in today's world. It has become an essential part of our being. It is impossible to think of a day in the life without smartphones. The impact of smartphones was mostly seen in the college students. The college students were always eager to be updated about what happened around the world, what the latest trends were and to not be felt left out from others. smartphones when it comes to college students acts as a platform for gaining, accessing and transfer of information.

In the present day especially after the impact of COVID 19, physical text books have been substituted by e books. Educational materials are easily available with just a click in smartphone especially since it provides easy internet access. The social media networks like WhatsApp have become a major measure of communicating and sharing notes, information across peers and teachers in the post pandemic era. The pandemic really enabled the students access to new arenas with the help of remote education by the means of different online platforms like zoom, Microsoft teams, google meet which are still being used in educational setting. Smartphone gives student the advantage of being assessing these different applications, it being easy to carry and affordable for a student. Though in the

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Received: May 11, 2023; Revision Received: September 27, 2023; Accepted: September 30, 2023

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surface level the smartphone use comes with many advantages, the negative effects of smartphone use cannot be overlooked. FOMO, Smartphone use severity and social networking usage has been a subject of interest in the present scenario. The excessive usage of social networking sites and FOMO is associated with smartphone use severity as social media and social networking sites like whatsapp, facebook, Instagram, youtube etc are easily available at the tip of the finger in the life of a student because of smartphone. Though smartphone as a technological innovation is aimed at fostering social connectedness among people, In the present world there has been mixed reviews on how smartphones and social media can foster a sense of social connectedness. It is often seen that smartphone acts as a substitute for human interaction. When it comes to college students who can be considered as one of the largest populations who use smartphone it is imperative to see whether the college students are being socially connected with their peers and the ones around them or are they filling the void of being disconnected with others by using smartphone.

### ***College Students in Indian Settings***

In Indian education system, the institutions that students choose to specialize in whether it is Undergraduate or Postgraduate after their school education can be placed in the common umbrella term 'college students' irrespective of whether the institution, they study is university/ university level institution, college/ colleges affiliated under university or standalone institution. In India students who have the grade 12 qualification or equivalent are eligible to enter the arena of college education. Though there is no age limit on the students who can avail college education. Most of the students undergo under graduation & post-graduation fall in the age category of 18 -23.

The age category of students who predominantly falls under college education can be classified under the term 'Youth' according to the definition given by United Nations on the population who falls under the age range 15 – 24. (United Nations). Developmental Psychologist Jeffery Jensen Arnet had coined the term Emerging adulthood to the population who falls under the age group 18 – 25 (Arnet, 2000) which was the universe of this study. According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report India has fifth of the world's youth population (Youth in India, 2022). According to (Arnet, 2000) emerging adulthood can be considered as a period of self-exploration in majorly three areas including work, love, and world views. The early 20's to mid-twenties is also the time when the emerging adults go to pursue their higher education or may even switch their career paths. On their journey to adulthood the young college students may face different challenges and may indulge in exploring one self. Arnet (2000) for which technological interventions like smartphone play a major role. Since college students can be considered as one of the populations which has highest rate of smartphone ownership, this population is denoted by the term 'hyper – connected.' (Anderson & Rainie 2012 as cited in Lepp et al., 2013).

### ***Smartphone Use and Fear of Missing out***

Smartphone use when it gets problematic can affect the psychological wellbeing. It was also found that people with low psychosocial wellbeing are tend to use smartphone to escape from the negative feelings which can end up being problematic. (Wang et al., 2014). Problematic smartphone use was also associated with levels of stress (Yang et al, 2021) so, students may tend to smartphone use as a coping mechanism against stress. The negative impact of smartphone use on students were many. Smartphone seems to divert students from focusing on the academics. Spending time on the social networking sites and leisurely activities was slowly engulfing the time to be spend for studies. There was higher

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probability for the students to divide their attention among multiple tasks while being on smartphone or being scrolling through the device which reduces their productivity. The seriousness of this situation can be understood by the plethora of applications available in play store which can help in preventing task switching and restricting access to the selected social networking sites for the required duration of time. Since smartphone use has become an integral part of a student's life, it is important to study about the impact the smartphone use on a college student.

FOMO can be considered as one of the reasons for problematic smartphone among college students. Fear of missing out popularly known as 'FOMO' emerged in 2004, and gained its popularity in 2010. Gupta et al., (2021). FOMO can be described as a state of being worried about an interesting event happening elsewhere. (Oxford Advanced learners dictionary). It was found that people who fall in the category of high levels of FOMO tend to use smartphone excessively to stay connected. (Elhai et al., 2016; Yang et al, 2021; Tugtekin et al., 2020). which can lead to problematic smartphone use. Studies conducted by (Elhai et al., 2020a) found that FOMO acted as a predictor of Smartphone use frequency and Problematic smartphone use. FOMO, Smartphone use severity and social networking usage has been a subject of interest in the present scenario. It was also found that excessive use of social networking sites and high level of FOMO contribute to smartphone addiction and vice versa. (Li et al., 2020).

When it comes to college students whose major mode of communication to others is facilitated by smartphone, it was important for them to be always alert on the input they get from the smartphone. This can be taken into consideration since applications like WhatsApp, Gmail, SMS is being utilized to communicate important aspects of the students' academic life to them. It might be disastrous if they miss any important issue. Apart from that since college students may be staying away from family and friends, they may feel they are missing out what was happening in their lives and may have the urge to be constantly on the phone to see what they are up to. Since FOMO was majorly associated with missing out what the individual's loved ones or ones in the social circle do, social connectedness was an important factor to consider.

### ***Social connectedness***

Social connectedness can be defined as "the sense of belonging and subjective psychological bond that people feel in relation to individuals and groups of others." (Haslam & et al., 2015). It was found that individuals who have high levels of connectedness tend to be close with others and partake in social groups and activities, where in people with low social connectedness tend to be apart from others and world. (Lee et al.,2001a). even (Kohut,1984 as cited in lee et.al., in 2001a) suggested that apart from failing to develop necessary interpersonal behaviours necessary to sustain interpersonal relationship with others, people who have low level of social connectedness tend to lack a sense of deeper connection with in themselves. Since humans are considered as social animals, it was necessary that being socially connected to others is necessary for one's survival. In the present world the advent of digital technologies there has been mixed reviews on how smartphones and social media can foster a sense of social connectedness.

The covid 19 pandemic was a major factor that led to researches in the area of social connectedness. Since covid 19 pandemic restricted people's movement within their home, it has led to an increase in screen time behaviour. Though there have been researches investigating the social connectedness among elderly with the help of social networking

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sites and smartphone use there has not been much studies in literature which studies the role of smartphone use and FOMO in social connectedness. One of the studies conducted among the teacher candidates in a university of Turkey on technological addictions during the time of pandemic found out that social connectedness was high when there is low levels of smartphone, social media, and internet addiction. (Karabatak & Alanoglu, 2022).

There have been very few studies done on social connectedness along with FOMO and smartphone use. A study conducted in UK on 20 – 49-year-olds found out that as social connectedness increases FOMO decreases and vice versa. The study also found gender did not had any relation with social connectedness and smartphone use severity. Brown & Kuss, (2021). Another study found in literature was done on adolescents to understand the level of disconnectedness faced by them during pandemic and found FOMO as an important risk factor with respect to social connectedness. parent & et al (2021).

There was a lack of literature existing in social connectedness in literature among college students in association with FOMO and smartphone use. Most of the studies done in association with smartphone use and social connectedness was in Turkey. There have been few studies done in elderly on how smartphone helps in fostering social connectedness. However, it was to be noted that college students being more exposed to smartphone and social media sites it was necessary to study how smartphone usage helps in fostering social connectedness and reducing FOMO or whether smartphone use helps in making the college students feel socially disconnected from each other.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Objectives*

- To study the relationship between smartphone use, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social connectedness among college students.
- To study the relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and social connectedness among college students
- To study the relationship between FOMO and smartphone use among college students.
- To study the relationship between social connectedness and smartphone use among college students.
- To study the relationship between social connectedness and FOMO among college students.

### *Hypotheses*

- H<sub>0</sub> 1: There is no significant relationship between smartphone use, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social connectedness among college students.
- H<sub>0</sub> 1.1: There is no significant relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and smartphone use among college students.
- H<sub>0</sub> 1.2: There is no significant relationship between FOMO and social connectedness among college students.
- H<sub>0</sub> 1.3: There is no significant relationship between social connectedness and smartphone use among college students.

### *Participants*

The sample of the study is college students pursuing Undergraduate and Post graduate courses in India (Predominantly kerala and Karnataka) in the age range of 18 – 25 years.

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The researcher has used convenient sampling technique. 277 individuals took part in the study out of which responses of 265 participants are taken for statistical analysis.

### Materials

- 1. Social connectedness scale – Revised:** The scale developed by Richard M lee, Matthew Draper and Sujin Lee in 2001 is a revision of the social connectedness scale constructed in 1995 by Richard M lee and Steven.B. Robbins. The scale is used to measure sense of belonging in psychological sense or people's perception of interpersonal closeness with others in a social setting. The internal item reliability measured with Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.92.
- 2. Smartphone use scale:** It was developed by Ms. Shankhabela Mukherjee, Dr. Subrata Dasgupta in the year 2020. The different dimensions of smartphone use: smartphone use and interpersonal relationships, smartphone as a precious possession, smartphone as a companion, smartphone as a tool for evasion, smartphone as an instrument of multiple utility are measured. The scale has a concurrent validity of 0.76 and the internal consistency of the scale, measured using Cronbach's alpha is 0.712.
- 3. FOMO scale:** The FOMO scale is a unidimensional scale developed by. Przybylski et al, in 2013. Internal consistency of the scale measured in Cronbach's alpha is 0.90.

### Variables

- **Dependent Variable:** FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Social Connectedness
- **Independent Variable:** Smartphone use

### Operational Definitions

- 1. Smartphone use:** smartphone use can be considered as using an internet enabled phone for social and non-social purposes which includes but not restricted to calling others, browsing news, accessing the social networking sites, for studying, messaging, taking pictures, playing games etc., i.e., utilizing all the facilities provided by the smartphone to gain, share information, and connect with others.
- 2. Social connectedness:** social connectedness can be considered as the level of closeness one feels to other individuals or social groups.
- 3. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** FOMO can be considered as the anxiety an individual faces when they feel like they are not being able to keep up with what is happening in the world or in the lives of other individuals around them.

### Ethical Consideration

The participation for the study was voluntary. Informed consent was taken from the participants. Confidentiality of the participants who took part in the study will be maintained.

### Research Design

The study followed correlational design. The statistical analysis is done using SPSS 20.0 software. The statistical methods used for the study is Pearson Product moment correlation to understand the relationship between variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study the results were presented and discussed according to hypotheses wise they are as follows.

**H<sub>0</sub> 1: There is no significant relationship between smartphone use, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and social connectedness among college students.**

**H<sub>0</sub> 1.1: There is no significant relationship between FOMO and smartphone use among college students.**

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Smartphone Use and FOMO**

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
1. Smartphone Use	265	74.48	15.47	-	
2. FOMO	265	24.28	7.23	.43**	-

**Note:** \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard deviation) and the correlation among smartphone Use and Fear of missing out (FOMO). Among the 265 participants, the mean for smartphone use obtained was 74.43 and the SD is 15.47. The mean and standard deviation of the participants obtained in FOMO was 24.28 and standard deviation of 7.23. the spread was more on smartphone usage as compared to FOMO.

The table 4.1 also shows the correlation between smartphone use and FOMO among college students. The ‘r’ value was 0.43 with the corresponding p value 0.01. Since the corresponding p value was 0.01, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant relationship between Smartphone use and FOMO among college students.

This result was in line with the research conducted by (Wolniewicz et al, 2018) which was found to be that the problematic smartphone use was mostly related to FOMO (fear of missing out). The study also found that problematic smartphone use was especially associated with social smartphone use. The findings of the study were also supported by the findings of (Tugetkin et, al, 2020) as they have found significant correlation between problematic smartphone use and FOMO among 469 undergraduate students in Anadolu University Faculty of Education in Turkey. A study was conducted by (Elhai, 2016) found that smartphone addiction scores and smartphone frequency were significantly correlated. According to (Gezgin et al, 2018) on 161 high school in Turkey also found positive correlation between smartphone use and FOMO.

In another study conducted by (Buyukbayraktar, 2020) among the university students in Turkey also found positive correlation between FOMO and smartphone addiction. Even (Sun & et al, 2022) also found out that there was a significant positive correlation between FOMO and problematic smartphone use.

**H<sub>0</sub> 1.2: There is no significant relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and social connectedness among college students.**

**Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for FOMO and Social connectedness**

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
1.FOMO	265	24.28	7.23	-	
2.Social Connectedness	265	76.04	13.00	-.22**	-

**\*\* Note:** \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4.2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the college students in FOMO and social connectedness. Table 4.2 also shows the correlation between FOMO and social connectedness in college students. The r value is -0.22 with corresponding p value 0.01. So, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was significant negative relationship between FOMO

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and social connectedness which implies that as social connectedness increases fear of missing out decreases and vice versa.

This finding was in line with the study conducted by (Darmansyah & Sumaryanti, 2022), on the emerging adults in the Bandung city of Indonesia. The study conducted by (Roberts & David, 2020) on 107 US undergraduate students also found that FOMO was negatively associated with social connection.

**H<sub>0</sub> 1.3: There is no significant relationship between smartphone use and social connectedness among college students.**

**Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Social connectedness and Smartphone Use**

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2
1.Social connectedness	265	76.04	13.00	-	
2.Smartphone Use	265	74.48	15.47	-.31**	-

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4.3 shows the mean, Standard deviation and correlation for social connectedness and smartphone use among college students. It also shows the correlation between smartphone use and social connectedness. The r value is -0.31 and the corresponding p value 0.01. The null hypothesis was rejected. There was significant negative relationship between smartphone use and social connectedness. As smartphone use increases social connectedness decreases and vice versa.

This finding was in line the research conducted by Karabatak & Alanoglu (2022) on students studying in the university of Turkey which found that there was a significant moderate negative relationship between social connectedness and smartphone addition. A study conducted by (Savci & Aysan, 2017) on 201 adolescent students in Turkey found out that there was a low negative correlation between social connectedness and smartphone addiction.

However, the study conducted by (Cirak & Dost 2022) on 451 university students in Turkey found out that that nomophobia does not have any relationship with social connectedness and life satisfaction and does not have any impact on social connectedness.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study found out that there was a significant positive correlation between smartphone use and FOMO. This can be read in line with Self-determination theory proposed by (Deci & Ryan, 1985) build on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It also identifies these needs play an important role in the wellbeing, motivation, and growth in the life of an individual. Based on the self-determination theory, (Przybylski et al, 2013) proposed that individual who were less satisfied in their basic needs may use the social media to develop the social connection with others. it can be also that FOMO and engaging in social media network could be to fill in the gap of not getting the basic needs (Przybylski et al., 2013). Since smartphone with its feature of internet connectivity hosts a lot of applications through which individuals can get in touch with others and know what they were up to. Since smartphone provides easy access to various social media sites and applications and it is portable, there was a high chance the smartphone use was having a significant positive relationship with FOMO. This can be also be connected to the study by

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Al-Harrasi & Al-Badi, (2014) who found that 96% of college students used smartphones to access the social media applications.

Other finding of the study was the significant negative correlation between smartphone use and social connectedness. The existence of significant negative relationship between FOMO (fear of missing out) and social connectedness is also a finding of the study. It means that as social connectedness increases fear of missing out decreases and vice versa. These two findings should be read together. This result can be associated with the belongingness hypothesis by Baumeister & Larry in 1995. Human beings were considered as social animals. The need of belongingness can be considered as one of the fundamental aspects of an Individual. The Belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister & Larry, 1995) which suggested that human beings have the innate desire to form positive interpersonal relationship with each other. Failure to do so will lead to loneliness, isolation. Smartphone has lot of inbuilt applications and internet connectivity which will give assistance to whatever need a college student has which is not just restricted to studies. There are numerous platforms and applications including YouTube study channels which provides unlimited access to knowledge. When it comes to asking for directions to an unknown place, there was Google map in smartphone. So, the need to be connected to others is not a necessity among others especially with college students who are updated with the latest technological innovation in the present. This is consistent with the finding of Kushlev (2017) who found that there was a huge chance that casual social interactions among people can be replaced by technological innovations. Phubbing, the act of avoiding social interaction with person sitting in front of them by being involved in phone is one type of way to decrease social connectedness.

The finding of the study a significant negative relationship between FOMO (fear of missing out) and social connectedness means that as social connectedness increases fear of missing out decreases and vice versa. So, this finding was also consistent with the self-determination theory by (Ryan & Deci, 1985) as proposed by (Przybylski et al, 2013) about how FOMO and social media usage can be having an indirect connection due to the deficit in the basic psychological needs of relatedness. In this study we can generalize that smartphone use being a passage to various social media applications and ways to connect with people can be used by people to fill in the void of social connectedness.

### ***Implications***

In present scenario we cannot survive without the digital devices like smartphone, laptop etc. when it comes to youth, especially college students, they were dependent on their digital devices. Not only were smartphones very much useful only for the educational purposes. The youth of today is also glued to their smartphones, they tend to be out of focus of what was happening around them. It was to be noted that, the pandemic had increased every one's screen time. The FOMO was preventing the youth to focus on the tasks necessary for them, since they always tend to be distracted by seeing notifications in the smartphone of what new update, they have got in their social media sites, or whether they missed some one's call or did they miss what their friend has posted. The frequent checking of smartphone to ensure that they are not missing out can lead to form smartphone addiction, which can impair the optimal functioning of college students.

Though the technological intervention of smartphone was supposed to improve the social connectedness of youth, it was very evident that technology failed to foster the social connectedness. Since the smartphone gives answers to even directions to a place with the help of google map, the college students tend to not interact or connect with others. There



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was also a chance that being closed indoors during pandemic had led the youth to social interaction anxiety. There was a high chance that the students may experience loneliness due to low social support and tend to use application available in smartphone to fill the void.

The lack of social connectedness can lead to severe negative outcomes in college students. They can even develop mental health conditions like depression. Therefore, it was important to make the youth aware of how much negative impact smartphone is bringing into their lives. So, the youth should be made to practice digital media detox. They should be made to have a healthy relationship with their smartphone. Necessary offline activities and programmes should be implemented in colleges to promote social connectedness among students so that they will not depend up on the smartphone and develop smartphone addiction.

### Limitations

1. The study was conducted using self-reported questionnaires, So, it was difficult to understand whether the participants have given the accurate answers.
2. The study was a quantitative study, a mixed method study including a qualitative approach would make it easier to understand more about role of smartphone use in fostering social connectedness and FOMO in college students.
3. The questionnaires for FOMO and Social connectedness were not Indian tools. Tools standardized in Indian context would give a better picture of social connectedness and FOMO among youth in India.

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### **Acknowledgment**

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Patani, N.S. & Kiran, B.N.C. (2023). Smartphone Use, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Connectedness among College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(3), 4584-4594. DIP:18.01.427.20231103, DOI:10.25215/1103.427