

Research Paper

## Exploring the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigates the link between social media usage and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among college students, focusing on gender differences. The research, conducted with 60 students from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, found a significant positive correlation between social networking addiction and Fear of missing out, suggesting that increased engagement intensifies fear of missing out. However, gender differences were not statistically significant. The findings align with Self-Determination Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory, emphasizing the psychological impact of social media-driven FoMO. The study recommends awareness campaigns, digital detox strategies, and mindfulness programs to promote healthier social networking use.

**Keywords:** *Social networking Usage, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Gender Differences, Social Comparison, Psychological Impact*

Social media has revolutionised communication, enabling instant connection and self-expression. While platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok offer numerous benefits, they also contribute to psychological experiences like the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This research examines the link between social media engagement and FoMO, emphasising its psychological, social, and behavioural impacts.

### **Social Media**

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) social media is defined “as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content.”

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social media as digital platforms that allow users to create public or semi-public profiles, establish connections, and navigate their networks within a structured system. Over time, these platforms have evolved beyond simple communication tools, becoming influential forces in shaping culture, identity, and societal norms.

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### *Fear of Missing Out (Fomo)*

FoMO, a relatively recent psychological concept and according to *Przybylski et al. (2013)* social media is described as "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent"

This phenomenon often arises from the basic human need to belong and be included in meaningful social experiences. FoMO is characterized by a constant desire to stay connected with what others are doing, often driven by feelings of inadequacy or exclusion. *Abel et al. (2016)* extend this definition by highlighting FoMO as a social anxiety exacerbated by the ubiquitous connectivity of social media platforms.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Aim:** To explore the link between social media usage and Fear of Missing Out (fomo) among college students.

### *Objectives:*

- The study aims to investigate the correlation between social media usage and FOMO among college students.
- To analyze whether there are significant gender differences in social media usage and fomo among college students.

### *Hypotheses:*

There is a significant positive link between social networking usage and fomo.

There is no significant gender difference in social media usage and fomo.

### *Problem Statement:*

The widespread use of social networking has raised concerns about its psychological and behavioral effects, especially the Fear of Missing Out (fomo). This research aims to examine the connection between social media usage and fomo among college students, while also investigating the influence of gender differences in this link.

### *Sample Size and Background:*

The study includes a sample of 60 college students aged between 18 to 25 years, from various colleges or universities located in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The participants were selected to represent a diverse demographic of college-going students.

### *Sampling Method:*

The participants were selected using random sampling. A digital questionnaire link was randomly distributed via social media platforms of college students in Delhi and UP. This ensured easy accessibility and voluntary participation.

### *Tools Description:*

- **Fear of Missing Out Scale (fomos):** The 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire known as the Fear of Missing Out Scale (fomos) was created by Przybylski et al. (2013) to assess individuals' levels of fomo.
- **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS):** Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015) created the 5-point Likert scale known as the Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF), which is intended to evaluate students' addiction to social media. The

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four sub-dimensions of virtual tolerance, virtual communication, virtual difficulties, and virtual information comprise its 29 components.

### *Statistical Method:*

IBM SPSS 30 was used for data analysis.

## RESULTS

*Table 1: Correlation Analysis*

	SMAS	FoMO
SMAS	1	.602**
FoMO	0.602**	1

Table 1 presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis assessing the link between SMAS and FoMO. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) at the 0.01 level, indicating that increased SMAS scores are linked to higher FoMO levels.

*Table 2: Significance of difference between males & females in SMAS & FoMO*

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	Significance (2-tailed)
SMAS	Male	30	86.10	18.940	1.944	0.057
	Female	30	78.67	8.938		
FoMO	Male	30	25.83	9.440	1.851	0.070
	female	30	22.00	6.286		

Table 2 represents the descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test results for **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS)** and **Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)** across **male and female** participants.

Males reported higher social networking Addiction (SMAS) and Fear of Missing Out (Fear of missing out) scores than females, with greater variability in their responses. However, independent samples t-tests showed that these gender differences were not statistically significant (**SMAS:  $t(58) = 1.944$ ,  $p = .057$** ; **FoMO:  $t(58) = 1.851$ ,  $p = .070$** ), indicating no strong evidence of a gender effect.

## DISCUSSION

This study found a substantial positive association ( $r = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between college students' use of social media and their fear of missing out (FoMO). The results support earlier studies showing that frequent engagement with social media amplifies FoMO by exposing individuals to precisely chosen online information, which feeds anxiety and social comparison. Studies like Alt (2015) and Roberts & David (2020) highlight the ongoing pattern of social media use, where compulsive checking behaviours are fuelled by FOMO and exacerbate emotional distress. These findings are further supported by study by Beyens et al. (2016), which indicates that elevated levels of FoMO may be linked to inappropriate social media behaviours and elevated anxiety.

The assumption that men and women suffer identical psychological impacts was supported by gender analysis using an independent t-test, which showed no substantial differences in

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social media addiction ( $p = 0.057$ ) and FoMO levels ( $p = 0.070$ ). Findings from Ashwanth Sudheer & Saligram (2023) corroborate the findings of the current study, despite some research (Parveiz & Ayub, 2023) suggesting that males may experience more FoMO because of competitiveness.

The results are consistent with psychological theories such as Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which emphasises how social media amplifies comparisons, and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which explains FoMO as a reaction to unmet psychological demands. The study emphasises the need for programs that encourage social networking use with awareness because excessive use can have a detrimental effect on productivity, self-esteem, and mental health.

### CONCLUSION

This study emphasised that higher social media participation leads to compulsive checking behaviours and mental suffering, confirming the strong link between social networking sites and FOMO. There were not any obvious gender differences, indicating that FoMO affects men and women equally. The results emphasise how critical it is to promote healthy digital habits and increase awareness of the psychological effects of social media.

*Limitations* can be the use of self-reported data, which may create biases, and a small sample size (60 students from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh). To prove causation, future studies should use experimental techniques and bigger, more varied samples.

*Implications* include creating intervention techniques to encourage better social networking usage, such as mindfulness training, digital detox programs, and educational campaigns. Future research should look at the long-term impacts of FOMO on psychosocial well-being as well as how institutional and parental support can lessen its effects.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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