

Research Paper

## FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Social Interaction Anxiety among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

In the growing field of psychology, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has become a universal concept in recent years where individuals are influenced by social media which paves the way for the development of social anxiety and related disorders. FoMO refers to the feeling that other people are enjoying themselves more, having better lives, or having better experiences than one's life. People are social beings that desire social interactions in groups, therefore feeling excluded can have negative psychological effects which results in the occurrence of FoMO. Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) is the discomfort experienced when interacting with others, whether they are friends, strangers, or those of the opposing sex (Mattick & Clark, 1998). This research aimed to study the nature of relationship as well as gender differences between FOMO and SIA. This was conducted among a group of young adults, who were selected by convenience sampling method. Both male and female samples are included in the both samples. Data were collected through self report questionnaires: FoMOs - Fear of Missing Out Scale, developed by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell (2013) and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) - Developed by Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998). The present study was analysed by t-test and correlation research method. It was revealed that there are no significant gender differences between male and female population in FOMO and SIA and that there exists a significant relationship between FOMO and SIA.

**Keywords:** *Fear of missing Out (FOMO), Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA), Social interaction*

An advancement in technology makes the younger generation more intrigued towards using it, where they become disconnected and lonelier from the environment. In this way, young adults become more vulnerable to the development of social anxiety which leads to the occurrence of the feeling of fear of missing out (FOMO) from the society. The worry and discomfort that someone has when they believe they are missing out on enjoyable or meaningful activities is known as "fear of missing out," or FOMO. It became a most common form of problematic social media attachment, and it's linked to a variety of unpleasant life events and emotions, including lack of sleep, diminished life skills, emotional stress, detrimental impacts on one's physical well-being, anxiety, and a lack of

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emotional control (Cham et, al, 2019 & Alutaybi et, al 2019). Males were more prone than females to turn to social media when suffering from a sense of FOMO, and younger people tended to experience severe uneasiness when they felt at risk of missing out on positive experiences. More than ever, people are exposed to a plethora of data about what other people are doing, and they are constantly left wondering if they are doing enough or if their lives are headed in the proper direction (Rifkin et, al 2015).

FOMO consists of two processes: first, a feeling of missing out, and second, a compulsive needs to keep up with social ties where it involves compulsive activities like monitoring and refreshing sites to maintain social connections as well as the perception of missing out, which causes anxiety. It is much related to the social exclusion or rejection from others. According to Maslow's hierarchy theory, a sense of belongingness is a fundamental need for humans to lead a life which is also known as 'Social hunger'. This phrase underlines how significant the need for belonging can be for some people and how FOMO can severely impact some others. Even a longer, better life has been tied to feeling socially connected (the opposite of FOMO). Younger people are significantly more at risk, because of the growing amount of time spent online and their greater sensitivity to and need for belonging and social acceptability.

Social interaction anxiety describes the discomfort experienced when interacting with others, whether they are friends, strangers, or those of the opposing sex. The biggest concerns are specifically the fears of being ignored, uninteresting, sounding ignorant, being incomprehensible, and not knowing what to say or how to react in social situations (Mattick, R.P.; Clarke, J.C. (1998). It is more specifically about the fear of being scrutinised by others or executing a task under their watch. Significantly, prior research indicates that persons with generalised social anxiety disorder can be distinguished from controls and individuals with particular (i.e., non-generalized) social anxiety disorder by having greater levels of social interaction anxiety (Heimberg, Mueller, Holt, Hope, & Liebowitz, 1992). It is possible that children who experience bullying, agony, rejection, or other types of humiliation are more likely to suffer from social interaction anxiety disorder. Furthermore, this illness could be connected to other negative life events including abuse, trauma, or family conflicts.

People with social anxiety avoid social interactions because they feel nervous there. As opposed to FOMO, when people are constantly worried about other people's happiness or enjoyment because they feel compelled to fulfill their need to belong to society. In this situation, a person with FOMO will never decline an opportunity to go to a social gathering with their friends, which is the exact opposite of a person with social anxiety. Yet, there is a potential that someone with FOMO could easily develop social anxiety. This may be explained by the fact that people with FOMO worry that others would find them less desirable and appealing, which may cause them to avoid social interactions which leads to the development of anxiety problems. The fear of missing out (FOMO) has become a popular term recently in the psychology field which was experienced by many individuals. Many research studies reveal that FOMO may act as a mediating factor between the social anxiety disorder and other anxiety or depression too. People with social anxiety are also at danger. They are more prone to avoid social interactions and rely more heavily on social media for connection and to lessen feelings of loneliness.

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Most of the research study only focused on FOMO and its relationship with Social Anxiety while this study mainly focused on FOMO which was influenced by Social Interaction anxiety.

“How FOMO, the smartphone and social media may be affecting university students in the middle east” by Chasity O’ Connell in 2012 implies that social media and smartphones are connecting students in unimaginable and fundamental ways. This study involved 244 participants both boys and girls who were doing undergraduate in psychology. And this study measures FOMO, anxiety, psychological well-being and attention of the students using Fear of missing out (FOMO) scale, zung anxiety inventory, psychological well-being (PWB) scale and Mindfulness attention and awareness scale. Students' scores in FOMO showed that females have a high level of fear compared to men (Connell C.O., 2012).

“Fear of missing out, mobile phone dependency and entrapment in undergraduate students” by Ananya Upreti and Priyanka Musalay in 2018. This research was conducted among undergraduate students from both government and private colleges as fear of missing is steadily becoming a global phenomenon, correlational studies had done to find a significant relationship between fear of missing out and mobile phone dependency among college students. This study revealed that overdependence and problematic use of smartphones was most correlated with anxiety among the undergraduate students (Upreti A. & Musalay P., 2018).

In 2017, Bianca S. Honnekari and colleagues conducted an exploratory study titled "Social anxiety and internet socialisation in Indian undergraduate students." 316 undergraduate students in total were screened for social anxiety using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and Social Phobia Scale (SPS). Based on their scores, the students were split into two groups, and their attitudes and behaviours regarding social media were then compared using a self-report questionnaire. Additionally, this study shows that women were more likely than men to exhibit social anxiety. The unwillingness to cut back on social media use was linked to high particular social phobia ratings (Bianca S. et al., 2017).

Wenjie Duan et al. conducted a study in 2020 titled "Relationship among Fear of Missing Out, Strategic Self-presentation, and Online Social Anxiety." The study looked at the mediating and moderating roles of both positive and honest self-presentations in the relationship between FOMO and OCA. A total of 796 university students participated in the study, and self-presentation, FOMO, and OCA were measured using the Positive Self-presentation Scale and the Honest Self-presentation Scale, respectively. The female participants produced higher positive self-presentation and lower honest self-presentation than the male samples (Duan W., 2020).

In 2023, Fengxia Lai and colleagues conducted a study titled "Relationship between social media use and social anxiety in college students, a mediation effect of communication capacity." According to this study, social media use among college students may be connected to social anxiety. The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) was used to measure social anxiety in a large sample of 1740 students from seven Chinese colleges. According to the correlational studies, social anxiety was positively correlated with passive social networking site use and significantly correlated with active social media use (Lai F. et al., 2023).

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In 2022, Li Li and colleagues conducted a study titled "A network analysis approach to the relationship between fear of missing out (FOMO), smartphone addiction, and social networking sites (SNS)." According to this study, network analysis was utilised to assess the connection between smartphone addiction, FOMO, and SNS use. Using the Chinese Trait-State Fear of Missing Out Scale, a sizable sample of 1258 Chinese university students was selected. According to the studies' item level network analysis, fomo had a favourable correlation with both smartphone addiction and SNS use. The global edge strength and network structure did not significantly differ by gender (Li Li et al., 2022).

Ufuk Tugtekin et al. examined "Associations Between Fear of Missing Out, Problematic Smartphone Use, and Social Networking Services Fatigue Among Young Adults" in 2020. The purpose of this study was to adapt the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Overload and Social Networking Service (SNS) Fatigue Scale to measure the overload and fatigue experienced by individuals while using ICTs in Turkish, as well as to analyse the adapted scale based on various variables. A total of 225 undergraduate university students were included in the study. The findings indicate that there was a substantial gender difference in participants' PSU and SNS Fatigue levels, with females outperforming males. However, there were no significant differences in FoMO levels among subjects based on gender. (Tugtekin U. et al., 2020).

### **METHODS**

#### ***Aim***

- To explore the nature of relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) among Young Adults.

#### ***Objectives***

1. To examine the levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) among males and females.
2. To explore the relationship between FOMO and SIA.

#### ***Hypotheses***

1. There will be no significant differences between male and female population in FOMO and SIA.
2. There will be no significant relationship between FOMO and SIA.

#### ***Research Design***

This is a study with correlational descriptive research design. This was adopted to learn about the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables, and to get in-depth information about the same.

#### ***Participant recruitment***

The sample were young adults from various parts of Chennai. The age range was from 18 to 25, where 19.14 (SD = 1.023) was recorded as the mean age. There were 63 males and 78 females in the sample, who were selected through snowball sampling technique.

#### ***Variables***

1. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) - This phenomenon consists of 2 processes: perception of missing out, followed up with a compulsive behaviour to maintain these social connections (Gupta M. & Sharma A., 2021).

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2. Social Interaction Anxiety - the discomfort experienced when interacting with others, whether they are friends, strangers, or those of the opposing sex (Mattick & Clark, 1998).

### Data collection

To gather the data, along with demographic data sheet, the following measures were employed:

- **FoMOs - Fear of Missing Out Scale:** The present study makes use of the Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell (2013), is a self report inventory of 10 items. Responses are of Likert scale, from 1 (not at all true of me) till 5 (extremely true of me). The range of scores is from 0 to 50. This scale hold high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .82$ ; Przybylski et al., 2013) and sufficient reliability.
- **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS):** Developed by Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998), this is a self-report inventory with 20 items. The responses range from 0 (not at all characteristic or true of me) to 4 (extremely characteristic or true of me). Items 5, 9 and 11 are reverse scored. The scores range from 0 to 80. The construct reliability of this scale ranges from 0.91 to 0.93, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.96.

### Procedure

The sample was collected through an online questionnaire circulated through Google Forms. This covered demographic information, followed by the respective standardised questionnaires. Consent was sought from the participants before taking part in the study, upon which the responses were collected.

A non-probability sampling technique was used to collect the samples. The total sample size recorded was 141.

### Data analysis

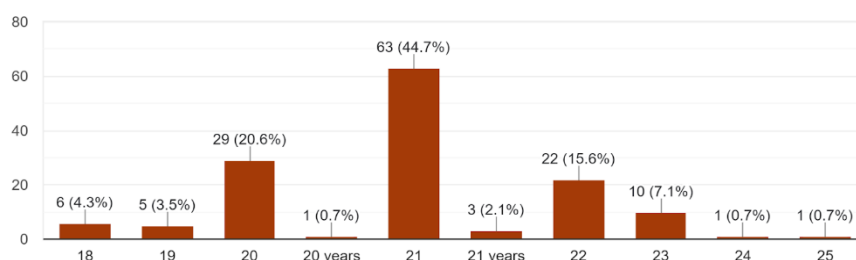
Statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 25 software. The data was analysed using Pearson's product-moment correlation and independent sample t-tests.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of participants was 141. The age group of the participants varies from 18 - 25 years, as seen from Figure 1. The mean age is recorded as 19.14 (SD = 1.023). From the sample, 4.3% were 18 years old (n = 6), 3.5% were 19 years old (n = 5), 21.3 % were 20 years old (n = 30), 46.8 % were 21 years old (n = 66), 15.6% were 22 years old (n = 22), 7.1 % were 23 years old (n = 10), 0.7% were 24 years old (n = 1), 0.7% were 25 years old (n = 1).

**Figure 1** The age distribution of the sample

Age (in years)  
141 responses



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**Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables studied**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	141	17	22	19.14	1.023
FOMO TOTAL	141	10	44.00	27.5745	7.74618
SIAS TOTAL	141	0	72.00	31.6099	14.76471

FOMOTOTAL indicates the total score of Fear of Missing Out and SIASTOTAL indicates the total score on Social Interaction Anxiety Scale.

From Table 1, it is observed that the mean score for FOMOTOTAL is 27.5745 (SD=7.74618). The possible scores for the FOMO scale range from 10 - 50, the mean scores are thus in the normal range. The mean score of SIASTOTAL is found to be 31.6099 (SD =14.76471). The possible scores range from 0 - 80 and thus a mean score of the group i.e 33.1986 falls under a normal range. The minimum score of the group is 0.00 which indicates the absence of social interaction anxiety. The maximum score obtained in SIAS is 72.00 which is understood as a significantly higher level of Social anxiety. The cut off score is said to be 36 (Peter,2000) above which it is predicted for a possible diagnosis of Social Anxiety.

**Table 2: Independent sample t test between FOMO TOTAL and gender**

	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Interpretation
FOMO TOTAL	Male	63	27.1429	8.13764	-	139	0.554	No significant difference between the groups
	Female	78	27.9231	7.44987				

An independent sample t-test was conducted for the total score on FOMO between the genders. Equal variance is assumed through Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. As a result of the independent sample t-test, the significance (2- tailed) was found to be 0.554 which is higher than 0.05 which means that there is no significant difference between the male and female population with respect to Fear Of Missing Out, which indicates that males and females don't differ much in the scores of Fear of missing out.

**Table 3: Independent sample t test between SIAS TOTAL and gender**

	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
SIAS TOTAL	Male	63	27.1429	8.13764	-	139	0.080	No significant difference between the groups
	Female	78	27.9231	7.44987				

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An independent sample t-test was conducted for the total score on SIAS between the genders. Equal variance is assumed through Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. As a result of the independent sample t-test, the significance (2-tailed) was found to be 0.145 which is higher than 0.05 which means that there is no significant difference between the male and female population with respect to Social Interaction Anxiety, which indicates that males and females don't differ much in the scores of Social Interaction Anxiety.

**Table 4: Correlation between FOMOTOTAL and SIASTOTAL**

	SIASTOTAL
FOMOTOTAL	.298**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson's product-moment correlation was carried out to find if there is a relationship between Fear of Missing Out and Social Interaction Anxiety. From the results, it is seen that the correlation coefficient between Fear of Missing out and Social Interaction Anxiety was found to be  $r = 0.298$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between Fear of missing out and Social Interaction Anxiety. This means that if the score of one variable, for instance, FOMO increases, the other (SIA) also increases and vice versa, and if the score of one variable decreases the other also decreases.

### CONCLUSION

1. There are no significant differences between male and female population in FOMO and Social Interaction Anxiety.
2. There is a significant relationship between FOMO and SIA.

### Summary

This study investigated the link between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) among young persons aged 18 to 25 in Chennai. A total of 141 participants (63 males and 78 females) were chosen via snowball sampling and completed standardised self-report questionnaires measuring FOMO and SIA. The study used a correlational descriptive methodology to investigate gender differences and the relationship between the two variables. The results showed no significant variations in FOMO or SIA levels between males and females. A substantial positive association was established between FOMO and SIA ( $r = 0.298$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher FOMO is connected with higher social interaction anxiety levels.

### Limitations:

1. The samples collected were limited to specific geographic location (Chennai).
2. The sample size is limited because of the short duration of the research.
3. The Sampling technique that is used here, limits generalisation of the results.
4. The tools used aren't in the Indian context.

### Implications:

1. Fear of missing out can be used to study along with other variables like social media usage, personality, attachment styles and other related areas.
2. The results can be used to develop interventions for social interaction anxiety.
3. These variables can be done in a larger context with people from different geographical areas.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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