

Research Paper

Comparative Study of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Between Gen Z And Millennials

Writika K Patel^{1*}

ABSTRACT

In the digital era, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has emerged as a significant psychological concern linked to pervasive social media use. This study aimed to compare FoMO levels between Generation Z and Millennials and investigate its relationship with daily social media usage. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 50 participants evenly divided between the two generations. FoMO was measured using the validated 10-item scale by Przybylski et al. (2013), and social media use was self-reported in hours per day. Descriptive statistics indicated moderate FoMO levels in both groups, with Gen Z reporting slightly higher scores ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.65$) than Millennials ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.70$). Mann-Whitney U test revealed no significant difference between the generations in FoMO levels ($U = 262.5$, $p = .34$). Spearman's correlation showed a moderate but nonsignificant association between social media use and FoMO in Gen Z ($r_s = .31$, $p = .14$), whereas the correlation was weaker in Millennials ($r_s = .24$, $p = .24$). These findings suggest that FoMO is similarly experienced across these generations, and social media usage alone may not fully explain FoMO's variation. The study contributes to understanding the psychological impact of digital engagement across age groups and has implications for developing targeted mental health interventions.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Gen Z, Millennials*

In today's digital world, where technology and online connectivity are part of everyday life, social media has become an important space that shapes how people connect, communicate, and share experiences. It has many benefits but, it has also given rise to a new psychological concern known as the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).

The concept of FoMO was first introduced by Dan Herman (2000) and in recent years it was defined by Przybylski et al. (2013) as a persistent sense of anxiety that others might be experiencing rewarding experiences without one often accompanied by a strong habit to remain constantly online. With the spread of smartphones and the 24/7 exposure of social media, FoMO has come increasingly common, affecting not only how people use digital platforms but also how they perceive themselves and their lives.

¹MA Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, Kaushalya University

^{*}[Corresponding Author](#)

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FoMO also results from not knowing about a discussion, seeing other having all the fun, not attending any function or jubilee, it has been linked to a number of negative cerebral and behavioural symptoms.

First described in the early 2000s, FoMO gained wider recognition around 2010 as social networking sites began transforming how people communicate and maintain connections. Since then, it has become a central theme in studies of digital behaviour and mental health.

FoMO in any generation can be influenced by several psychological factors, mainly perceived stress, loneliness, self-esteem, social pressure and unmet needs for social connectedness and belonging.

Key Psychological Factors Influencing FoMO

- **Perceived Stress** Higher levels of stress are strongly associated with greater FoMO, because stressful individuals use social media more, leading to increased awareness of missed experiences.
- **Loneliness and Social Isolation** Both generations experiences increased FoMO when feeling lonely or disconnected, because using social media makes them compare themselves with others and feel less satisfied.
- **Self Esteem** Individuals with lower self-esteem are more open to FoMO, particularly when actively engaged in social media.
- **Social Connectedness and Pressure** The need for belonging and peer validation, often heightened by digital platforms, drives compulsive checking and participation to avoid missing out.
- **Social Media Fatigue and Usage** Excessive use and fatigue from social media, combined with pressure to maintain an active online presence, amplify FoMO.
- **Social Comparison** Constant exposure to others activity on social media leads to social comparison, triggering anxiety and dissatisfaction.

Several psychological theories provide frameworks for examining generational behaviors. Erikson's psychosocial development theory highlights the stages of identity formation relevant to young adults, while the socioemotional selectivity theory explains how motivational shifts influence emotional regulation over time across generations. These theories help situate the psychological traits and coping mechanisms distinctive to Gen Z and Millennials.

Feeling FoMO occasionally is quite normal but, persistent FoMO has been linked to a wide range of negative outcomes. Studies show strong associations with higher levels of stress, anxiety, loneliness, sleep disturbances, reduced life satisfaction, lower productivity, and unhealthy social comparisons. This means FoMO is not just a transient worry but a real psychological concern with important implications for overall well-being.

Generational context also plays an important role in shaping how FoMO is experienced. Millennials (born 1981–1996) were the first generation to transition from offline to online lifestyles during their adolescence and early adulthood. For them, FoMO often relates to life events, career milestones, or social achievements. In contrast, Generation Z (born 1997–2012), are digital natives who have grown up with smartphones, instant messaging, and social media as a constant presence. Their experiences of FoMO are often more intense, driven by continuous digital immersion and stronger dependence on online validation.

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This study focuses on two prominent generational groups: Generation Z and Millennials.

Despite these insights, researches directly comparing the two generations remains limited. Most existing studies have examined either Gen Z or Millennials in isolation, or have explored FoMO in relation to variables such as personality traits, loneliness, or general social media usage. Few studies have investigated the differences in the intensity and patterns of FoMO between these two age groups, leaving a significant gap in current understanding.

Sharma et al. (2023) found that Gen Z reported higher levels of FoMO and social media use than Millennials, with FoMO positively linked to time spent on social networking sites and negatively associated with emotional stability.

Similarly, Kaur & Soni (2024) reported that while stress and loneliness did not differ across generations, Gen Z experienced significantly higher FoMO compared to Millennials, with FoMO showing strong associations with both stress and loneliness.

Rationale of the research

The rationale for this research lies in the growing societal influence of these generations, who demonstrate distinct values, patterns of technological engagement, and stress responses compared to earlier group. Despite increasing scholarly interest, there remains a lack of quantitative data directly comparing psychological outcomes between Gen Z and Millennials, particularly in relation to mental health and social adaptation.

The significance of this study is to expand academic knowledge and also to generate practical insights. Understanding generational differences can help parents, educators, and mental health professionals in recognizing the digital pressures unique to each group. It may further guide the development of strategies for healthier online engagement and inform psychological interventions such as cognitive behavioural approaches aimed at reducing negative effects of FoMO on mental health.

Accordingly, this study aims to quantitatively assess and compare the levels of FoMO among Gen Z and Millennials using standardized psychological scale.

Objective

1. To examine whether there is a significant difference in the levels of FoMO between Gen Z and Millennials.
2. To determine whether Millennials report higher levels of FoMO compared to Gen Z.
3. To explore the relationship between daily social media usage time and levels of FoMO.

Hypothesis

- **H₀:** There is no significant difference in the levels of FoMO between Gen Z and Millennials.
- **H₁:** There will be difference in the levels of FoMO between Gen Z and Millennials.
- **H₂:** Millennials will report significantly higher levels of FoMO compared to Gen Z.
- **H₃:** There is a significant correlation between daily social media usage time and levels of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among participants.

Research Gap

While many previous studies have examined FoMO within a single generation, this study directly compares Gen Z and Millennials, who both engage heavily with digital (social media) platforms but differ in their technological and cultural upbringing. This comparative focus offers a broader perspective on how digital experiences shape emotional well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today's digital age, social media has become a central part of daily life, shaping how people connect, communicate and share experiences. While social media offers many benefits, it has also given rise to a psychological concern called the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). This term, initially introduced in the early 2000s and defined more precisely by Przybylski et al, (2013), describes a persistent anxiety that others might be experiencing rewarding events from which one is absent. This anxiety often leads to a strong need to remain continuously connected online.

Utami & Magistarina (2021) examined the relationship between FoMO and compulsive internet use among 300 millennials. They used correlation and regression analysis and found that FoMO plays a big role in driving compulsive internet use. The time spent online each day made this behaviour even stronger. They also found that different age stages within millennials did not change this relationship, showing that FoMO consistently affects their internet use.

Fitria et al. (2024) used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how FoMO affects the performance and productivity of Generation Z. Their findings showed that FoMO lowers self-confidence and increases anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. Together, these problems reduce Gen Z's overall performance. The study stressed that FoMO has serious negative effects on the mental health of digital natives.

Chakrabarti (2024) carried out a qualitative study to understand how social media – driven FoMO affects Generations Z. Through thematic analysis of participants experiences, the research found that FoMO increases anxiety, leads to compulsive checking of social media, and harms both self-esteem and overall mental health. The study highlighted the urgent need to create strategies that can reduce these harmful effects and promote healthier use of social media.

Lad (2024) studied Indian millennials use of online dating apps, focusing on trust and independence. Using the UTAUT framework, the study collected data through surveys. The results showed that performance expectations, social influence, and trust were the main reasons behind dating app adoption and continued use. Among these, trust and performance expectations were the strongest predictors. The study highlighted that psychological and social factors strongly influence how Indian millennials use online dating apps, offering insights into digital dating behaviours in modern India.

Mansukhani (2025) conducted a descriptive – correlational study on FoMO, anxiety and social media usage across different age groups. Data were collected from 86 people aged under 18 to 60 years through an online survey. Statistical tests such as descriptive analysis, ANOVA, and correlational were used. The results showed that FoMO was highest among people under 18 and reduced with age, which was similar to the trend found for anxiety. A strong positive correlation was found between FoMO and anxiety. The study also found differences in social media use by age: younger people preferred Instagram and Snapchat,

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older participants used Facebook more, while LinkedIn was most used by those aged 18-30. The research highlights age as an important factor in FoMO and anxiety, stressing the need for age-specific mental health programs.

Karishma & Bhatt (2025) studied the relationship between social media use and FoMO among 60 Indian college students from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. They used surveys and correlation analysis to test their ideas. The result showed a clear positive relationship: students who used social media more often experienced stronger FoMO. However, the study found no major gender differences in FoMO levels. The researchers suggested running awareness programs and mindfulness activities to help younger people develop healthier online habits.

Elsayed (2025) examined the relationships between fear of missing out (FoMO), social media use, life satisfaction, and academic performance among 521 Saudi university students. The study found that higher FoMO was linked to greater social media use and lower life satisfaction, while social media use was negatively associated with academic performance. Mediation analyses further showed that FoMO mediated the link between social media use and life satisfaction, whereas social media use mediated the relationship between FoMO and academic performance.

Alshowkan and Shdaifat (2025) investigated the associations between personality traits, fear of missing out (FoMO), and social media addictions (SMA) among 411 nursing students in Saudi Arabia. The results showed the conscientiousness and FoMO were positive predictors of SMA, while neuroticism and female gender were linked to lower addiction levels. Male students reported higher FoMO, higher SMA, and scored higher on neuroticism and openness compared to females. Although most students had low FoMO, a considerable proportion demonstrated moderate levels of SMA, highlighting the influence of personality and FoMO on digital addiction risks.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to compare levels of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) between two generational groups and to examine its relationship with daily social media usage.

Sample and Population

The sample consisted of 50 participants, divided equally into Generation Z (born 1997-2012) and Millennials (born 1981-1996). Participants ranged in age from 13 to 44 years. They were recruited online through social platforms and provided voluntary informed consent before taking part in the study. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active users of social media. The final sample included 25 participants in each generational group, with representation across gender and age.

Sample Method

Participants were selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure inclusion of active social media users from Generation Z and Millennials.

Variables

- **Independent Variable:** Generational groups, classified as Gen Z and Millennials based on year of birth.

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- **Dependent Variable:** FoMO level, measured through total scores on the 10 item FoMO scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013).
- **Additional Variable:** Daily social media usage (in hours), treated as a continuous variable to explore its relationship with FoMO.

Psychological Measure

Data were gathered through a structured online questionnaire. The questionnaire included demographic questions, the 10-item FoMO scale by Przybylski et al. (2013), and items about social media use. The FoMO scale contained statements such as “ I fear others have rewarding experiences than me”, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Extremely true). Questions on social media use covered time spent online, platforms used, frequency of checking, and night time usage.

Procedure

Participants accessed the questionnaire through a secure online link. After giving informed consent, they completed the survey in sequence. Data collection took place over a two-week period, with responses automatically recorded. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board before data collection began. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were maintained throughout the study.

Data Analysis Methods

Responses were scored to calculate composite FoMO scores by averaging the 10-item for each participant, producing scores between 1 and 5. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information and FoMO scores within each group. Inferential analyses included the Mann-Whitney U test to compare FoMO levels between Gen Z and Millennials, and Spearman’s rank-order correlation to examine the association between FoMO and daily social media usage.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The study included a total of 50 participants, with 25 participants in each generational group i.e. Gen Z and Millennials.

The average FoMO scale, calculated by taking the mean of all 10 items on the FoMO scale for each participant, was slightly higher for Gen Z ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.65$) compared to Millennials ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.70$). This indicates that, on average, both groups reported moderate levels of FoMO.

As for daily social media usage, Gen Z participants spent slightly more time online ($M = 2.62$ hours per day) than Millennials ($M = 2.32$ hours per day). Overall, these descriptive statistics suggest that both generations engage in similar levels of social media use and experience comparable FoMO levels.

Inferential Statistics

To see whether FoMO levels differed between the two generations, a Mann-Whitney U test was concluded. The results showed no significant difference in FoMO scores between Gen Z and Millennials, $U = 262.5$, $z = 0.96$, $p = 0.34$. This means that, in this sample belonging to either generation does not make a noticeable difference in people’s FoMO.

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Next, Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine whether daily social media usage was related to FoMO score within each generation. For Gen Z, there was a moderate positive correlation ($r_s = 0.31$), which suggests that participants who spent more time on social media tended to have higher FoMO scores. However, this correlation was not statistically significant ($p = 0.14$), meaning the trend cannot be considered reliable.

For Millennials, the correlation between daily social media usage and FoMO scores was weaker ($r_s = 0.24$) and also not statistically significant ($p = 0.24$). This indicates little evidence of a meaningful relationship between the amount of time spent on social media and FoMO in this group.

Summary, Overall, the results suggest that both Gen Z and Millennials experience similar levels of FoMO, and daily social media usage does not show a statistically significant association with FoMO in either generation, although Gen Z who use social media more show a small tendency to have higher FoMO.

TABLES

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of FoMO and Social Media Usage by Generation

Generation	Mean FoMO Score	SD FoMO Score	Mean Social Media Usage (hours/day)
Gen Z	2.54	0.65	2.62
Millennials	2.34	0.70	2.32

Table 2 Mann-Whitney U Test Results Comparing FoMO

Test Statistics	Value
U	262.5
z	0.96
p-value	0.34
Significance	Not significant ($p > 0.05$)

Table 3 Spearman's Correlation Between Social Median Usage and FoMO

Generation	Spearman's rho (rs)	p-value	Interpretation
Gen Z	0.31	0.14	Moderate positive, not statistically significant
Millennials	0.24	0.24	Weak positive, not statistically significant

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The study showed that both Generation Z and Millennials experience moderate levels of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Although Generation Z reported slightly higher average scores than Millennials, the difference was not large enough to be statistically meaningful. This suggest that FoMO is common across both generations. These results are in line with earlier research suggesting that how social media platforms shows only the best part of people's life which make others feel left out. The statistical analysis also revealed only weak and nonsignificant links between daily social media use and FoMO levels in both groups.

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This means that simply spending more time on social media does not necessarily lead to higher FoMO.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Findings from this study are similar to those of Sharma et al. (2023) and Kaur and Soni (2024), who reported that Generation Z tends to experience slightly higher FoMO due to their greater digital involvement and frequent need for social validation. However, unlike some studies that found a strong connection between social media use and FoMO, this research did not find a significant relationship. This is consistent with the work of Chakrabarti (2024) and Elsayed (2024), who argued that FoMO is shaped by multiple factors, including personality traits, psychological needs, and social comparison. Previous studies have emphasized that the tendency to compare oneself with others and the desire to stay updated are key drivers of FoMO, which matches the patterns seen in this study.

Implications

The findings suggest that FoMO is present in both generations, regardless of how much time they spend on social media. This highlights the role of deeper issues such as self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and social pressure in influencing FoMO. Therefore, approaches to improve digital well-being should not focus only on reducing screen time. Instead, they should also address stress management, build self-confidence, and strengthen real-life social connections. Teaching young people to understand the selective and curated nature of online content can also help them resist negative social comparisons and reduce the impact of FoMO on their mental health.

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study. First, the sample size was relatively small and chosen through purposive sampling, which may reduce how well the findings can be applied to the wider population. Second, information on social media use was self-reported, which may not always be accurate. Third, the study's cross-sectional design means it cannot prove cause and effect relationships between social media use and FoMO. Further studies should use larger and more diverse samples, along with longitudinal methods, to better capture how FoMO develops and changes over time.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Key Results

This study showed that both Generation Z and Millennials experience moderate levels of FoMO, with Gen Z scoring a little higher, but not by a meaningful margin. The Mann-Whitney U Test confirmed that the difference between the two generations was not significant. Spearman's correlation also found only a moderate but nonsignificant link between daily social media use and FoMO levels in both groups. In short, FoMO seems to be a common issue across both generations, and social media use alone does not fully explain why it happens.

Recommendations

- Mental health support for FoMO should focus on building resilience, confidence, and coping skills rather than just cutting down on social media use.
- Social media literacy programs can help users – especially young people – understand healthy ways of engaging online and recognize that what they see on social media is not the full picture of other's lives.

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- More efforts should be made to strengthen offline friendships and support networks, since stress and loneliness play an important role in shaping FoMO.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Future studies should involve larger and more diverse groups of people and use long-term designs to see how FoMO develops and changes over time.
- Researchers should also look at how factors like personality, cultural background, and different social media features affect FoMO.
- Experimental studies could test how effective different digital wellbeing programs and awareness strategies are in reducing FoMO among various age groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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