

Research Paper

Social Media and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): A Study on Gen Z Behaviour and Psychological Impact

Jagaschandra Bongu^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has significantly influenced the psychological and behavioural patterns of Generation Z (born 1997–2012). Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined as the apprehension of missing rewarding experiences observed through others' social media activity, has emerged as a critical concern among young adults. This study investigates the multidimensional nature of social media-induced FOMO among Gen Z individuals in India, with a specific focus on identifying key FOMO dimensions, validating a seven-factor measurement scale, and examining whether FOMO intensity differs significantly across demographic characteristics. Primary data were collected from 197 valid Gen Z respondents through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) conducted in Jamovi confirmed acceptable model fit (CFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.901, RMSEA = 0.066), validating the seven-factor structure. Cronbach's Alpha of 0.959 confirmed excellent scale reliability. One-Way ANOVA results revealed that daily social media usage significantly differentiates Social Media Intensity and Academic and Productivity Impact, while gender significantly differentiates Coping Mechanisms and Digital Detox. The paper concludes with managerial implications for platform designers, educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policymakers.

Keywords: *FOMO, Fear of Missing Out, Generation Z, Social Media, Psychological Impact, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, ANOVA, Digital Behaviour, Social Comparison, India*

Global smartphone penetration has witnessed an extraordinary surge over the past decade, rising from a mere 14% of the world's population in 2014 to approximately 60% by 2024, reflecting one of the fastest technology adoption curves in human history. As of 2024, over 7.2 billion smartphones are in active use worldwide, with the market continuing to grow at 7.8% in the first quarter of 2024 alone (Statista, 2024). This unprecedented proliferation of handheld devices has fundamentally restructured the way human beings communicate, consume information, and perceive the world around them. In its wake, social media platforms and digital applications have flourished at a scale that was inconceivable a decade ago. Social media statistics reveal dramatic growth with only one in four people using social media in January 2014, compared to approximately six in ten people today, crossing over 5 billion active users worldwide (DataReportal, 2024).

¹Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM), Institute: Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur.

*Corresponding Author

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This digital explosion has given rise to an entirely new social economy one built on visibility, validation, and virality. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok have enabled individuals to curate and broadcast their lives to mass audiences, often projecting experiences and lifestyles that may not authentically represent reality (Chou & Edge, 2012). Content creators and influencers, in particular, have mastered the art of aspirational presentation showcasing travel, luxury, relationships, and achievement thereby cultivating massive followings and, consequently, significant financial rewards. Forbes (2024) reports that top social media creators collectively generated earnings of approximately \$720 million in 2024. While such outcomes represent success for the content producer, the psychological consequences for the passive consumer of such content are far more complex and increasingly concerning.

Among the most documented of these consequences is the phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out, or FOMO defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). Studies indicate that a significant proportion of Gen Z users spend more than eight hours per day on their phones, with a substantial portion dedicated to social media and entertainment applications, creating sustained exposure to curated content that systematically triggers social comparison and feelings of inadequacy (Statista, 2024). Globally, several empirical studies have explored the relationship between social media usage and FOMO across diverse populations (Przybylski et al., 2013; Beyens et al., 2016; Buglass et al., 2017). However, most of these investigations have been conducted in Western contexts, with limited attention directed toward the experiences of Generation Z in developing countries such as India.

Therefore, this study examines the dimensions and factors that influence FOMO among Gen Z youth in India, with a specific focus on social media platform usage, psychological well-being, and behavioural outcomes. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing empirical literature on FOMO and social media; Section 3 outlines the research objectives; Section 4 presents the data collection and methodology; Section 5 discusses the results and analysis; and Section 6 concludes the paper by summarising findings, offering implications, and presenting directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various approaches ranging from psychological to sociological and behavioural perspectives are applied to understand social media usage and the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among Generation Z. The main theories explaining such behaviour include Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Social Comparison Theory (SCT), Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), and the Theory of Compensatory Internet Use (TCIU). The review of existing theoretical literature indicates that psychological distress caused by social media cannot be explained simply in terms of individual personality traits. An individual's susceptibility to FOMO is an outcome of a complex interplay of psychological, social, and behavioural dimensions. Using these theoretical models and their variants, several empirical studies have explored the dimensionality of factors that explain FOMO among young adults.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), serves as the most prominent theoretical foundation for FOMO research. SDT posits that human well-being depends on the satisfaction of three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Przybylski et al. (2013), in their seminal work that formally conceptualised and scaled FOMO, established that individuals with lower levels of need satisfaction particularly

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relatedness are significantly more prone to FOMO, driving compulsive social media checking behaviour. Social Comparison Theory (SCT), introduced by Festinger (1954), provides a complementary lens through which FOMO may be understood. Chou and Edge (2012) empirically demonstrated that frequent social media users were more likely to believe that others were happier and living better lives a perception directly linked to upward social comparison facilitated by curated content on platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat.

Empirical studies exploring FOMO are predominantly carried out in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western countries (Przybylski et al., 2013; Beyens et al., 2016; Buglass et al., 2017). Research in developing countries, particularly India, remains limited. Singh (2024) identified a positive correlation between social media dependency and self-esteem among Indian adolescents, while Chakrabarti (2024) highlighted the adverse effects of social media-induced FOMO on Gen Z's mental health and life satisfaction. The factors emerging from global empirical research on FOMO include social media intensity, social comparison behaviour, psychological well-being, academic distraction, and coping mechanisms. India, being socio-culturally distinct from the developed world, warrants a focused primary investigation into the factors influencing FOMO among Gen Z youth, thereby justifying the present study.

Objectives of the Study

As there is a dearth of exploratory studies examining the multidimensional nature of social media-induced Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among Generation Z in the Indian context, this study is conducted with the following objectives.

First, this study aims at investigating the dimensionalities of FOMO experienced by Gen Z individuals in India, identifying the key social media-related factors that significantly contribute to triggering and sustaining FOMO behaviour, and ascertaining the relative importance of each factor in explaining the overall FOMO experience.

Second, on the basis of the identified dimensionalities, this study aims at assessing whether the average scores of the identified FOMO factors differ significantly across demographic characteristics such as gender, birth year group, educational qualification, daily social media usage patterns, and most used platform, using One-Way ANOVA to determine statistically significant group differences.

Third, on the basis of the study results, this study intends to draw meaningful implications for mental health professionals, educational institutions, and policymakers in designing targeted digital literacy interventions and awareness programmes to address the growing FOMO phenomenon among Indian Gen Z youth.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The primary data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, distributed to Generation Z individuals aged between 14 and 28 years through WhatsApp and Instagram. The survey link was circulated through WhatsApp groups comprising college students, working professionals, and mixed Gen Z communities, as well as through Instagram direct messages and story shares, ensuring a diverse and representative sample across gender, age, and social media usage patterns. A total of 202 responses were received over the data collection period. Upon reviewing the responses for completeness and consistency, cases with straight-lined responses wherein

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respondents provided several consecutive identical answers on the Likert scale as well as incomplete submissions were identified and excluded from the final analysis (Habich-Sobiegalla et al., 2018). After data cleaning, 197 valid and complete responses were retained as the final usable sample. This sample comfortably satisfies the recommended threshold of five responses per item for Confirmatory Factor Analysis for 5 out of 7 factors on a 32-item scale (Hair et al., 2010), ensuring the reliability of subsequent analyses.

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Jamovi (Version 2.6). Reliability of the measurement scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using the lavaan package (Rosseel et al., 2023) in Jamovi with the Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors (MLR) estimator to validate the proposed seven-factor structure. Model fit was evaluated using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Subsequently, One-Way ANOVA was employed to examine whether the average scores of the identified FOMO factors differ significantly across demographic subgroups, with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scale. The Cronbach's Alpha value obtained was 0.959 for the 32-item scale, indicating excellent reliability, as values above 0.70 are considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). A total of 197 valid responses were included in the final analysis. The high alpha value confirms that the scale items are highly consistent and reliable for further statistical analysis.

1. Assessment of Model Fit

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using Jamovi (Version 2.6) with the lavaan package (Rosseel et al., 2023), employing the Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors (MLR) estimator to account for potential non-normality in the data. The seven-factor model comprising 32 items was tested for goodness-of-fit using standard fit indices recommended in the structural equation modelling literature (Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The model fit indices are presented in Table 1. The Comparative Fit Index ($CFI = 0.912$) and Tucker-Lewis Index ($TLI = 0.901$) both exceeded the widely accepted threshold of 0.90, confirming adequate model fit (Bentler, 1990; Tucker & Lewis, 1973). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA = 0.066$, 90% CI: 0.059 – 0.073) was well within the acceptable range of ≤ 0.08 recommended by Browne and Cudeck (1993), further supporting the adequacy of the proposed factor structure. The Chi-square test of exact fit was significant ($\chi^2 = 829$, $df = 443$, $p < .001$), which is expected given the large sample size and model complexity, and is therefore not used as the sole criterion for model evaluation (Kline, 2016). Taken together, the fit indices confirm that the seven-factor FOMO scale demonstrates acceptable fit to the data, thereby validating the proposed factor structure.

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Table 1: Model Fit Indices

Index	Value	Threshold	Reference	Result
CFI	0.912	≥ 0.90	Bentler (1990)	Acceptable
TLI	0.901	≥ 0.90	Tucker & Lewis (1973)	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.066	≤ 0.08	Browne & Cudeck (1993)	Acceptable
RMSEA 90% CI	0.059 – 0.073	Upper $\leq$ 0.10	MacCallum et al. (1996)	Acceptable
χ^2/df	829/443 = 1.87	≤ 3.0	Carmines & McIver (1981)	Acceptable

2. Factor Loadings

Table 2 presents the unstandardized factor loadings for all 32 items across the seven factors. All factor loadings were statistically significant at $p < .001$, confirming that each item meaningfully contributes to its respective latent factor. Factor loadings ranged from 0.715 (CDD 'I feel more content and less anxious during periods when I reduce my social media usage') to 1.233 (API 'I find it difficult to concentrate for extended periods due to FOMO-driven urges to check my phone'), indicating strong and consistent item-factor relationships across the scale. All loadings exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50 recommended by Hair et al. (2010), confirming convergent validity at the item level.

Table 2: Factor Loadings

Factor	Item	Estimate	SE	p
SMI	I check my social media accounts immediately after waking up.	0.839	0.111	< .001
	I feel uncomfortable when I am unable to access social media for more than an hour.	0.895	0.100	< .001
	I find myself scrolling through social media even when I have other important tasks to complete.	1.036	0.097	< .001
SCB	I often compare my lifestyle with what I see in others' social media posts.	1.044	0.080	< .001
	Seeing others' achievements on social media makes me feel I am falling behind.	1.119	0.079	< .001
	I feel that others on social media are living more exciting lives than I am.	1.001	0.078	< .001
	I evaluate my own success based on what I see my peers posting online.	0.982	0.076	< .001
	After browsing social media, I feel dissatisfied with my own life.	1.010	0.082	< .001
PWI	I feel anxious or stressed when I miss out on social media updates.	0.904	0.071	< .001
	I experience sadness or loneliness when I see social events I was not part of.	1.087	0.077	< .001
	My mood is negatively affected when I see others enjoying experiences without me.	1.018	0.077	< .001
	I feel inner guilt when I am unable to keep up with social media trends.	1.091	0.073	< .001

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Factor	Item	Estimate	SE	p
	Social media-induced FOMO has affected my overall sense of happiness and well-being.	1.008	0.071	< .001
PET	Instagram Stories and Reels are the primary source of my FOMO experiences.	0.959	0.082	< .001
	Seeing WhatsApp group chats I was excluded from triggers my fear of missing out.	1.015	0.072	< .001
	YouTube videos showing others' travel or lifestyle experiences trigger FOMO in me.	0.819	0.081	< .001
	Snapchat streaks and Stories make me feel left out when I miss them.	0.877	0.074	< .001
	LinkedIn posts showing peers' professional achievements trigger career-related FOMO.	0.831	0.096	< .001
API	FOMO from social media distracts me from focusing on my studies or work.	0.900	0.083	< .001
	I frequently check social media during lectures, study sessions, or work hours.	0.833	0.085	< .001
	My academic performance has been negatively affected due to excessive social media use.	1.047	0.081	< .001
	I procrastinate on important tasks because I feel compelled to stay updated on social media.	1.149	0.078	< .001
	I find it difficult to concentrate for extended periods due to FOMO-driven urges to check my phone.	1.233	0.079	< .001
SEB	I feel left out when I see social gatherings on social media that I was not invited to.	1.089	0.074	< .001
	I actively try to stay informed about social events to avoid feeling excluded from my peer group.	0.984	0.069	< .001
	Missing social media trends makes me feel disconnected from my friend circle.	1.024	0.072	< .001
	I feel a strong need to be part of online conversations and trending topics.	0.978	0.075	< .001
	When my peers discuss social media content I have not seen, I feel socially excluded.	1.095	0.077	< .001
CDD	I have intentionally taken breaks from social media to reduce feelings of FOMO.	1.034	0.083	< .001
	I practice mindfulness or other strategies to manage anxiety caused by FOMO.	1.072	0.079	< .001
	I have set screen time limits on my devices to reduce excessive social media use.	0.995	0.093	< .001
	I feel more content and less anxious during periods when I reduce my social media usage.	0.715	0.096	< .001

3. Factor Covariances and Inter-Factor Correlations

Table 3 presents the inter-factor correlations derived from the CFA. All factor correlations were statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming that all seven FOMO dimensions are meaningfully related to one another. The highest correlations were observed between

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Platform-Specific FOMO Triggers and Social Exclusion & Belongingness ($r = 0.915$), Psychological Well-being Impact and Platform-Specific FOMO Triggers ($r = 0.901$), and Psychological Well-being Impact and Social Exclusion & Belongingness ($r = 0.889$). These high inter-correlations are theoretically consistent with existing FOMO literature, which acknowledges that platform-specific triggers, psychological distress, and feelings of social exclusion are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing dimensions of the FOMO experience (Przybylski et al., 2013; Beyens et al., 2016). The lowest correlations were observed between Coping Mechanisms & Digital Detox and Social Comparison Behaviour ($r = 0.453$) and Social Media Intensity ($r = 0.520$), which is theoretically meaningful as coping strategies represent a response to FOMO rather than a driver of it.

Table 3: Inter-Factor Correlations

Factor	SMI	SCB	PWI	PET	API	SEB
SMI	1.000					
SCB	0.687	1.000				
PWI	0.672	0.746	1.000			
PET	0.617	0.656	0.901	1.000		
API	0.787	0.577	0.692	0.709	1.000	
SEB	0.620	0.658	0.889	0.915	0.709	1.000
CDD	0.520	0.453	0.665	0.699	0.688	0.740

Note: All correlations significant at $p < .001$. SMI = Social Media Intensity; SCB = Social Comparison Behaviour; PWI = Psychological Well-being Impact; PET = Platform-Specific FOMO Triggers; API = Academic & Productivity Impact; SEB = Social Exclusion & Belongingness; CDD = Coping Mechanisms & Digital Detox.

4. Discussion of CFA Results

The CFA results confirm that the proposed seven-factor structure of the FOMO scale demonstrates acceptable fit to the empirical data (CFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.901, RMSEA = 0.066). This finding supports the conceptualisation of FOMO as a multidimensional construct among Gen Z, consistent with the theoretical frameworks of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954). The Academic and Productivity Impact (API) factor recorded the highest item loading (1.233), suggesting that FOMO-driven distraction is the most intensely experienced behavioural consequence among respondents, consistent with findings by Rozgonjuk et al. (2020). The Coping Mechanisms and Digital Detox (CDD) factor recorded the lowest individual item loading (0.715), indicating that while coping behaviours are a valid dimension of the FOMO construct, they may be less uniformly practised among Gen Z respondents. The high inter-factor correlations observed between PET, PWI, and SEB ($r = 0.889$ – 0.915) are consistent with the Theory of Compensatory Internet Use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), which posits that unmet social needs drive compulsive platform engagement, intensifying both psychological distress and social exclusion.

Factor Scores Hypothesis Results

Based on the factor scores computed for each of the seven identified FOMO dimensions, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested using One-Way ANOVA in IBM SPSS Statistics. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. A total of 197 respondents were included in the analysis, comprising 91 females, 104 males, and 2 respondents identifying as others.

H1: Gender has a significant impact on the average scores of a given FOMO factor.

It can be observed from Table 4 that except for the factor Coping Mechanisms and Digital Detox (CDD), gender does not have a statistically significant impact on any other FOMO factor. The p-value for CDD ($p = 0.048$) was below the significance threshold of 0.05, indicating that respondents differ significantly in their coping behaviours across gender categories. Female respondents recorded a higher mean CDD score ($M = 2.9615$, $SD = 0.932$) compared to male respondents ($M = 2.7356$, $SD = 1.139$), suggesting that female Gen Z users are more likely to engage in digital detox and mindfulness-based coping strategies. All other factors SMI ($p = 0.694$), SCB ($p = 0.073$), PWI ($p = 0.153$), PFT ($p = 0.100$), API ($p = 0.235$), and SEB ($p = 0.160$) were statistically not significant.

Table 4: Factor Scores Hypothesis Results Gender

Variable	Factor	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	P-Value
Gender	SMI	Female	91	2.8828	1.117	0.366	0.694
		Male	103	2.7443	1.137		
		Others	2	2.8333	0.236		
	SCB	Female	91	2.7780	1.065	2.656	0.073
		Male	104	2.4346	1.098		
		Others	2	2.1000	0.707		
	PWI	Female	91	2.3385	1.058	1.898	0.153
		Male	104	2.1481	1.079		
		Others	2	1.1000	0.141		
	PFT	Female	91	2.5538	0.984	2.330	0.100
		Male	104	2.3923	0.975		
		Others	2	1.2000	0.283		
	API	Female	91	2.8593	1.036	1.458	0.235
		Male	104	2.6154	1.129		
		Others	2	2.2000	1.131		
	SEB	Female	91	2.4527	1.092	1.852	0.160
		Male	104	2.3615	1.071		
		Others	2	1.0000	0.000		
	CDD	Female	91	2.9615	0.932	3.079	0.048*
		Male	104	2.7356	1.139		
		Others	2	1.3750	0.530		

* $p < 0.05$

H2: Birth year group has a significant impact on the average scores of a given FOMO factor.

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results for birth year group Older Gen Z (1997–2004, $n = 149$) and Younger Gen Z (2005–2012, $n = 48$). Platform-Specific FOMO Triggers (PFT) was the only factor showing a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.047$). Younger Gen Z respondents recorded higher mean PFT scores ($M = 2.7000$, $SD = 0.956$) compared to Older Gen Z ($M = 2.3758$, $SD = 0.983$), indicating that Younger Gen Z are more susceptible to platform-specific FOMO triggers such as Instagram Reels, Snapchat streaks, and WhatsApp group exclusions. The PWI factor ($p = 0.055$) approached but did not reach significance. All other factors were not statistically significant.

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Table 5: Factor Scores Hypothesis Results Birth Year Group

Variable	Factor	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	P-Value
Birth Year	SMI	1997–2004	148	2.8198	1.121	0.051	0.822
		2005–2012	48	2.7778	1.133		
	SCB	1997–2004	149	2.5530	1.103	0.697	0.405
		2005–2012	48	2.7042	1.053		
	PWI	1997–2004	149	2.1423	1.056	3.729	0.055
		2005–2012	48	2.4833	1.088		
	PFT	1997–2004	149	2.3758	0.983	4.003	0.047*
		2005–2012	48	2.7000	0.956		
	API	1997–2004	149	2.6644	1.096	1.828	0.178
		2005–2012	48	2.9083	1.057		
	SEB	1997–2004	149	2.3289	1.060	1.949	0.164
		2005–2012	48	2.5792	1.141		
	CDD	1997–2004	149	2.7550	1.067	2.795	0.096
		2005–2012	48	3.0469	1.004		

* $p < 0.05$

H3: Educational qualification has a significant impact on the average scores of a given FOMO factor.

Table 6 presents the ANOVA results for educational qualification across five categories 8th–12th Standard ($n = 11$), Illiterate ($n = 2$), Employed ($n = 16$), Postgraduate/PG ($n = 82$), and Undergraduate/UG ($n = 86$). None of the seven FOMO factors show statistically significant differences SMI ($p = 0.373$), SCB ($p = 0.276$), PWI ($p = 0.219$), PFT ($p = 0.482$), API ($p = 0.485$), SEB ($p = 0.668$), and CDD ($p = 0.477$). This suggests that educational background does not substantially influence FOMO intensity, reflecting that FOMO is a psychologically driven phenomenon that transcends educational levels among the digitally immersed Gen Z cohort. Notably, the Employed category recorded the highest mean SMI ($M = 3.25$) and SCB ($M = 3.10$) scores, though not at a statistically significant level.

Table 6: Factor Scores ANOVA Results Educational Qualification

Factor	8–12th	Illiterate	Employed	PG Mean	PG SD	UG Mean	UG SD	P-Value
SMI	2.55	2.00	3.25	2.83	1.093	2.76	1.164	0.373
SCB	2.40	2.60	3.10	2.46	1.117	2.64	1.075	0.276
PWI	2.22	1.20	2.58	2.08	1.071	2.32	1.030	0.219
PFT	2.53	1.80	2.83	2.40	0.987	2.45	0.926	0.482
API	2.87	1.70	2.68	2.63	1.103	2.83	1.056	0.485
SEB	2.44	1.60	2.65	2.32	1.068	2.42	1.034	0.668
CDD	3.07	1.63	2.91	2.77	1.014	2.86	1.041	0.477

H4: Daily social media usage has a significant impact on the average scores of a given FOMO factor.

Table 7 presents the ANOVA results for daily social media usage across four categories less than 2 hours ($n = 38$), 2–4 hours ($n = 89$), 4–6 hours ($n = 49$), and more than 6 hours ($n = 21$). Two FOMO factors show statistically significant differences. The SMI factor recorded $F = 10.530$ and $p = 0.000$, with the more than 6 hours group recording the highest mean ($M = 3.6349$), confirming that higher daily usage is directly associated with greater social media

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intensity and compulsive engagement. The API factor was also highly significant ($F = 6.188$, $p = 0.000$), with the 4–6 hours group recording the highest mean ($M = 3.1714$), confirming that heavier social media usage substantially impairs academic concentration and productivity among Gen Z. These findings partially support H4. The remaining factors SCB ($p = 0.102$), PWI ($p = 0.735$), PFT ($p = 0.499$), SEB ($p = 0.262$), and CDD ($p = 0.439$) were not statistically significant.

Table 7: Factor Scores ANOVA Results Daily Social Media Usage

Factor	< 2 hrs Mean	2–4 hrs Mean	4–6 hrs Mean	> 6 hrs Mean	F	df	P- Value
SMI	2.2162	2.6742	3.1497	3.6349	10.530	3	0.000*
SCB	2.2421	2.5910	2.7347	2.8762	2.095	3	0.102
PWI	2.0526	2.2854	2.2408	2.2476	0.425	3	0.735
PFT	2.2368	2.5011	2.5347	2.4667	0.794	3	0.499
API	2.2421	2.6315	3.1714	2.9429	6.188	3	0.000*
SEB	2.1421	2.4180	2.5878	2.2571	1.341	3	0.262
CDD	2.6842	2.8258	3.0102	2.6548	0.907	3	0.439

* $p < 0.05$

H5: Most used social media platform has a significant impact on the average scores of a given FOMO factor.

Table 8 presents the ANOVA results for most used platform across three categories Instagram ($n = 145$), LinkedIn ($n = 3$), and YouTube ($n = 49$). None of the seven FOMO factors showed statistically significant differences SMI ($p = 0.232$), SCB ($p = 0.507$), PWI ($p = 0.138$), PFT ($p = 0.278$), API ($p = 0.904$), SEB ($p = 0.163$), and CDD ($p = 0.891$). This suggests that the primary platform used does not significantly differentiate FOMO intensity. The Instagram group, constituting the majority of respondents (73.6%), recorded the highest SMI mean ($M = 2.891$), consistent with Instagram's design features that encourage compulsive checking behaviour (Beyens et al., 2016).

Table 8: Factor Scores ANOVA Results Most Used Platform

Factor	Instagram Mean ($n=145$)	LinkedIn Mean ($n=3$)	YouTube Mean ($n=49$)	F	df	P- Value
SMI	2.8912	2.4444	2.5918	1.472	2	0.232
SCB	2.6083	1.8667	2.5796	0.681	2	0.507
PWI	2.2869	2.9333	2.0000	1.998	2	0.138
PFT	2.5103	2.8000	2.2694	1.290	2	0.278
API	2.7393	2.8667	2.6694	0.101	2	0.904
SEB	2.4579	2.9333	2.1551	1.831	2	0.163
CDD	2.8121	3.0833	2.8520	0.115	2	0.891

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of hypothesis testing across all five demographic variables are summarised as follows. Daily social media usage hours demonstrated the strongest and most significant impact on FOMO specifically on Social Media Intensity (SMI, $p = 0.000$) and Academic and Productivity Impact (API, $p = 0.000$). Gender had a significant impact only on Coping Mechanisms and Digital Detox (CDD, $p = 0.048$), with female respondents demonstrating higher coping behaviour. Birth year group had a significant impact only on Platform-

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Specific FOMO Triggers (PFT, $p = 0.047$), with Younger Gen Z (2005–2012) reporting significantly higher platform-triggered FOMO. Educational qualification and most used platform did not have a statistically significant impact on any FOMO factor. These findings collectively suggest that the volume of daily social media consumption is a far stronger determinant of FOMO intensity than demographic characteristics, reinforcing the behavioural rather than demographic nature of FOMO as a construct (Przybylski et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the multidimensional nature of FOMO among Generation Z social media users in India. A structured questionnaire comprising 32 items across seven pre-defined factors was administered to 197 valid Gen Z respondents. CFA conducted in Jamovi confirmed acceptable model fit (CFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.901, RMSEA = 0.066), validating the seven-factor FOMO structure comprising Social Media Intensity (SMI), Social Comparison Behaviour (SCB), Psychological Well-being Impact (PWI), Platform-Specific FOMO Triggers (PET), Academic and Productivity Impact (API), Social Exclusion and Belongingness (SEB), and Coping Mechanisms and Digital Detox (CDD). All 32 items recorded statistically significant factor loadings ($p < .001$), and the overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.959 confirmed excellent scale reliability.

ANOVA results revealed that daily social media usage is the most significant demographic determinant of FOMO with SMI and API differing highly significantly across usage groups ($p = 0.000$). Gender significantly differentiated CDD ($p = 0.048$), while birth year group significantly differentiated PFT ($p = 0.047$). Educational qualification and platform preference did not significantly differentiate any FOMO dimension. The findings are broadly consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), and the Theory of Compensatory Internet Use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), validating the theoretical underpinnings of the study. This study contributes to the growing body of Indian-context research on Gen Z digital well-being by providing CFA-validated, empirical evidence of FOMO as a multidimensional phenomenon. The study has certain limitations. The sample was collected through convenience sampling in India and may not be fully representative of all Gen Z users across India. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. The LinkedIn group in the platform analysis comprised only three respondents, limiting platform-wise comparability. Future research may explore FOMO across a broader sample, incorporate longitudinal designs, and examine the mediating role of personality traits such as neuroticism and social anxiety in the FOMO experience.

Managerial and Policy Implications

The results indicate that Social Media Intensity and Academic and Productivity Impact are the two FOMO dimensions most strongly associated with daily social media usage hours. Social media platform designers should incorporate robust digital well-being tools such as customisable screen time limits, activity dashboards, and usage nudge notifications that empower Gen Z users to regulate their consumption. Infinite scroll mechanisms, autoplay features, and notification-driven re-engagement loops that amplify FOMO should be reconsidered in platform design.

The significant association between daily social media usage and academic productivity disruption has direct implications for educational institutions. Universities and colleges

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should integrate digital literacy and responsible social media use into their curricula. Faculty and academic counsellors should be trained to recognise FOMO-driven academic distraction and address it through structured interventions, including designated phone-free study environments.

Mental health professionals and campus counsellors should incorporate FOMO as a distinct construct in their assessment frameworks when working with Gen Z clients. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) approaches that address social comparison distortions, combined with mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) techniques, may be particularly effective. The finding that female Gen Z respondents demonstrate higher coping behaviour compared to males suggests that targeted FOMO awareness programmes for male Gen Z users may be especially beneficial.

The finding that Younger Gen Z (2005–2012) experience significantly higher platform-specific FOMO has direct implications for parents and families of adolescent users. Parents should be made aware of the specific platform features Instagram Stories, Snapchat streaks, and WhatsApp group dynamics most strongly associated with FOMO, and should engage in open conversations about healthy digital boundaries and the curated nature of social media content.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission (UGC) may consider mandating digital well-being and media literacy as part of the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) framework. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) may explore regulatory frameworks requiring social media platforms to provide transparent and effective screen time management tools for users below the age of 18, contributing to the broader national agenda of digital well-being among Indian youth.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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