

A Fear Of Missing Out In Youth

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Abstract:

Background: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is the feeling that others are having more rewarding experiences leading to a constant need to stay online and 'connected' through social media, and this constant apprehension is found to be related to many mental health issues including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, social media addiction etc. People of all ages have reported to have some levels of FoMO but the youth faces the maximum brunt of it.

Materials and Methods: In this cross-sectional study, the levels of FoMO among 152 youth, grouped into two cohorts of 14- to 18- and 20- to 24- years old, who are students i.e., high-school and Masters' students, was compared while also checking for gender difference (High-school students=75, University students=77; Female=91, Male=61), and a possible interaction of the cohort one belongs to and their gender, if present.

Results: A two-way Analysis of Variance indicates that there is an interaction effect between gender and cohort on levels of FoMO ($p < 0.01$), with an effect size value of 0.051.

Conclusion: Younger female seems to be more susceptible to the fear of missing out, and have also been reported to be vulnerable to issues related to social media usage in general. In this digital age, it is important to be aware of factors like FoMO which is making it harder for many to leave their phones and have more connection with the real world.

Key Word: FoMO; Youth; Gender difference.

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I. Introduction

A survey by MyLife.com found that 56% of social media users experience FoMO, with 48% saying that social media makes them feel like they are missing out on experiences. While social media provides instant access to information, it's crucial to acknowledge its potential negative effects. Intensive use may trigger 'the fear of missing out' (FoMO) (Wegmann, Oberst, Stodt, & Brand, 2017, p .33) which is further associated with self-esteem. The health of youth or those in the age range of 14-25 (WHO), are thought to be affected the most by this rapidly growing virtual network, as such the study focused on them to find out their perception of FoMO.

Background on Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

FoMO is defined as "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" and "a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing" (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841). FoMO is when one is anxious about missing on important things in life and the fervent desire to stay in contact and up to date as they fear they will miss out on valuable experience or something that others enjoy. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), FoMO could be associated with the *esteem* and *social* needs explained in the human motivation theory (Maslow, 1943). They associate the FoMO with the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) arguing that FoMO is caused by the individual's unsatisfied basic psychological needs such as *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. They emphasized on the role of autonomy and competence in mitigating the negative effects of FoMO. FoMO can result from feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and a sense of inferiority and is related to a person's self-esteem and life satisfaction. FoMO is linked to problematic social media use among adolescents, because of the cosmopolitan presence of social media and the curated lives of people it shows, this along with a need for personal validation and the distorted sense of self that has emerged out of receiving appraisals through likes and comments which has become the new normal. The cognitive aspect of it is characterized by negative ruminations and anxiety due to heightened levels of fear of social exclusion which compels one to react to notifications and constantly check for updates so that they don't miss out on things. The constant awareness of missing out can create distorted perceptions of others' lives that looks perfect on social media platforms, while they are stuck and lonely which leads to a vicious cycle of compulsive checking and engagement. The time spent of these sites is related to emotional distress, the

longer time spent using SNS (spending more than 2 hours per day) revealed a significantly higher risk of having suicidality and has negative effects on academic performances. It is expected that a high level of FoMO affects approximately 16% of all Internet users – women and men alike, but the youth are in the epicenter (Jupowicz-Ginalska et al., 2018) while other findings suggests high rates in young people and young men in particular (Przybylski et al. 2013) as one in five people aged 15–30 exhibits a high level of FoMO.

Studies reveal that FoMO is likely related to the failure to meet the psychological belongingness and the apprehension of social exclusion (Przybylski et al., 2013a). It is also found that increased involvement in social media may distract individuals from real life social experiences in their physical surrounding, and this leads to a vicious cycle (Turkle, 2017). According to studies, FoMO may be associated with negative affect, depression and low levels of satisfaction with life (Ellison et al., 2007; Wortham, 2011). It is also believed that FoMO serves as a mediator between the already mentioned psychological variables like self-esteem, loneliness with social media engagement, such as Facebook addiction (Przybylski et al., 2013a). In other words, FoMO can combine deficiencies in psychological needs with involvement in social media.

Previous research findings indicate that FoMO is positively correlated with negative social and emotional experiences like boredom, loneliness, irritability, and inadequacy (Abel, Buff, & Burr, 2016; Edwards, 2017; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2007) and was found to be negatively associated with positive traits such as well-being, overall mood, and life satisfaction (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Przybylski et al., 2013; Wortham, 2011).

A brief review found that FoMO has been associated with intensive social media use, such as social networking addiction (Blackwell, Leaman, Tramosch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Tomczyk & Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018; Wang et al., 2018), the amount of stress experienced when using social networking sites (Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont, 2016), use of mobile phones while driving/learning (Przybylski et al., 2013), social media fatigue (Bright & Logan, 2018), decreased self-esteem (Buglass, Binder, Betts, & Underwood, 2017), poor sleep quality (Adams et al., 2016), college maladjustment (Alt, 2018), smartphone addiction (Wolniewicz, Tiamiyu, Weeks, & Elhai, 2018), neuroticism (Blackwell et al., 2017), depression (Elhai, Levine, Dvorak, & Hall, 2016), anxiety (Blackwell et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2016), and negative alcohol-related consequences (Riordan, Flett, Hunter, Scarf, & Conner, 2015).

FoMO can be managed by practicing mindfulness so as to track the negative thoughts and choose positive thoughts, taking regular breaks, socializing in the real world or engaging oneself in hobbies, and accepting that more times than not social media posts are tip of the iceberg and appearances can be deceiving as the person on the 'other' side of posts could also be experiencing FoMO too!

Review Of Literature

Rozgonjuk, Sindermann, Elhai and Montag (2021) in their study to assess difference in FoMO with respect to age, gender, and personality traits among 3370 German participants found no difference in mean scores between the different genders. The study reveals that younger participants scored higher on FoMO than male participants. Neuroticism was found to be significantly and positively associated with FoMO, while Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were negatively correlated with FoMO on the domain-level (with small correlations).

Qutishat (2020) in their study to check for gender differences of levels of FOMO of undergraduate students in Oman on a sample of 339 (Female=170, Male=169). The experiences of fear of missing out were measured by using the Fear of Missing Out scale. The data suggests that the undergraduate sample had moderate level of FOMO, however, male participants scored significantly higher than female participants, which could be because they need more social connections.

Gosain and Yadav (2020) in their comparative study on adolescents and young adults to get an insight of the pattern of their social media use and experience of FoMO on a sample of 100 students (Females=50, Male=50) found that there was significant difference between young adults and adolescents as they inferred that young adults use social media within certain limits knowing the positive and negative aspect of social networking sites.

Shoval et al. (2020) in their study on 40 college students of Israel to check for impact of night time phones usage through objective and subjective ways found a significant negative correlation among FoMO, sleep quality and psychological well-being, which indicates that repeated checking of phones for notifications and alerts during night time leads to reduced sleep quality and psychological well-being.

Elhai et al. (2018) in a correlation study found that among 296 participants FoMO was related to the demographic characteristics. Women had higher FoMO scores than men. Those who identify as white had higher FOMO scores than racial or ethnic minorities and those in non-cohabiting relationships had higher FoMO scores than those in cohabiting relationships. FoMO was found to be related to negative affectivity, social use of smartphones, and problematic smartphone use. The results show that negative affect is the biggest mediator in which FoMO will lead to problematic smartphone use.

In a study by Volgan (2019) where they tried to find the link between self-construal and FoMO among 566 MTurk participants, 287 from the US and 279 Indian, found that FoMO is positively and significantly correlated with interdependent self-construal, that is to say, those individuals who have close relationship with others and view themselves as part of group rather than having an independent identity are more vulnerable to FoMO.

Barry and Wong (2020) to check for potential generational or individual implications of FoMO, too age cohort differences and self-perception correlates of FoMO. A total of 419 subjects of the U.S. were members of 14- to 17-year-old, 24- to 27-year-old, 34- to 37-year-old, or 44- to 47-year-old cohorts. No difference among cohorts in FoMO levels with regards to close friends, or family members was seen. Across age cohorts, low self-esteem and loneliness were each associated with high levels of FoMO, particularly for individuals who were also engaged in relatively greater social media activity. The current study is interested in studying two cohorts that is from 14-18 years and 20-24 years, and other variables of interest are also present and hence the study was of interest.

Lake (2020) on their study on the “Social Isolation, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Media Use in Deaf and Hearing College Students”, a comparative study on the experience of the deaf/hard of hearing (N=46) and hearing (N=145) students found that FoMO and Self-esteem were negatively related, and in the hearing sample FoMO was related to hours spent and number of accounts used but not found in the deaf sample, though gender difference couldn't be established. They suggested the use rather than frequency, how social media is used is to be taken under considerations.

Rationale of the Study

Based on present literature, the fear of missing out (FoMO) is an indicative state of anxiety and discomfort one feels when they think they are missing out on fun or meaningful experiences, as compared to others. Research findings suggests that teenagers in general are among the most susceptible to FoMO because they highly value social acceptance and popularity among their peer groups. There are few comparative studies in India, as per the author's knowledge, as such the current study wants to see if there exists a difference in FoMO between a sample of high school adolescents and adult university students in Odisha, India, and also check for a gender difference and their interaction, if present.

Objectives

1. To compare the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) levels between the cohorts of youth of Odisha, grouped into high-school students and university students, and also check for gender difference using the Przybylski's FoMO scale.
2. To check whether cohort and gender interact in their impact on FoMO.

II. Method

Design: A cross-sectional comparative design was used to check for independent effect of gender and cohort, with levels high-school and university used to group late adolescents and young adult students, on their levels of FoMO. Further, a Two-way ANOVA was used for analysis and interpretation of data of FoMO between the two-factors i.e., cohort and gender which checked for main and interaction effect.

Participants: A total of 152 individuals voluntarily participated in the study. 77 of these participants were university students of different universities in Odisha, in the age group of 20 to 24 (M=21.43, SD=1.06) from various disciplines and 75 of them were high school students from different schools across Odisha, in the age group of 14 to 18 (M=16.51, SD=1.30).

Sampling Design: A mix of purposeful and area sampling design was used for the collection of data.

The participation was voluntary and the participants were given a detailed description of their rights, confidentiality and were asked to give their consent/assent for the research. As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, they have abided by the ethical standards during the course of the study.

Inclusion Criteria: For one group, students who were currently enrolled in universities were taken under consideration, and for the second group adolescents who were pursuing higher secondary education in institutions across Odisha, regardless of their genders, were considered for the scope of this study.

- Student
- Must be using social media platform

Exclusion Criteria: Young adults or teenagers who belonged to their respective age bracket but are not currently studying, and apart from that, other students or non-students of any other age group and/or are not from Odisha were not considered for the current study.

- Non-students
- Studying outside Odisha

Measures

Demographic and Personal Details Form: Participants were asked to sign on the consent form before filling basic demographic details including age, gender, class and course of study, location of institute, type of institute studying in and screen-time.

Fear of Missing Out Scale: The Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell (2013) was used to find the levels of FoMO in participants. The scale consists of 10 items; the response anchors are in a 5-point Likert scale with higher score indicating higher level of FoMO. The authors of the scale have provided a high value of Chronbach's alpha (.87 to .90) for the scale, and studies indicate satisfactory validity (see Appendix B).

Procedure

A form that consisted of the demographic and personal details form, which contained the consent form and Fear of Missing Out scale was made. Protocols were followed and the study abided by ethical standards. The participants were briefed about their rights, matters regarding the confidentiality of the information they were sharing, a need to give their assent/consent and also their choice to withdraw and/or not wanting to provide information at any stage of filling the form and objectives of study. None of the participants received any kind of remuneration or incentives for participating in the study. After completion of the form, the participants were thanked for their participation in the study.

Statistical Analysis

The data was organized using MS Excel software. The raw data was converted to standardized scores based on the scoring key provided in their respective manuals, and data was uploaded to IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 for further analysis. The output or results obtained after analysis was interpreted, graphs were plotted for better clarity and the results obtained were discussed and compared to the current literature. The limitations, implications and feedback for future studies were provided. The level $P < 0.05$ was considered as the cutoff value or significance.

III. Result

Comparison of Means of FoMO of Cohorts and between Genders

Table 1 shows the comparison of means of levels of FoMO between the high school adolescents and university students, and also between male and female youth using the t-test. The means of the groups show average levels of FoMO.

Table 2 shows the result of two-way ANOVA. Main effects were not significant in case of FoMO, but an interaction between gender and cohort was seen ($F(1,148)=7.954, p<0.01$), with partial eta squared value of interaction being 0.051. Table 3 shows estimated marginal means of groups of the two groups, while Figure 1 depicts the interaction of the cohort and gender.

Table 1: Comparison of Mean Values of FoMO between Cohorts and Gender

	High School(N=75)	University (N=77)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t(150)	p
FoMO	27.08	5.66	25	6.22	2.05	.033*
	Female(N=91)	Male(N=61)				
FoMO	26.00	6.03	26.07	6.05	-.066	.948

Note. t(df)= t statistics (degrees of freedom), p= significance level

Table 2: Test of Between-subjects Effect for FoMO

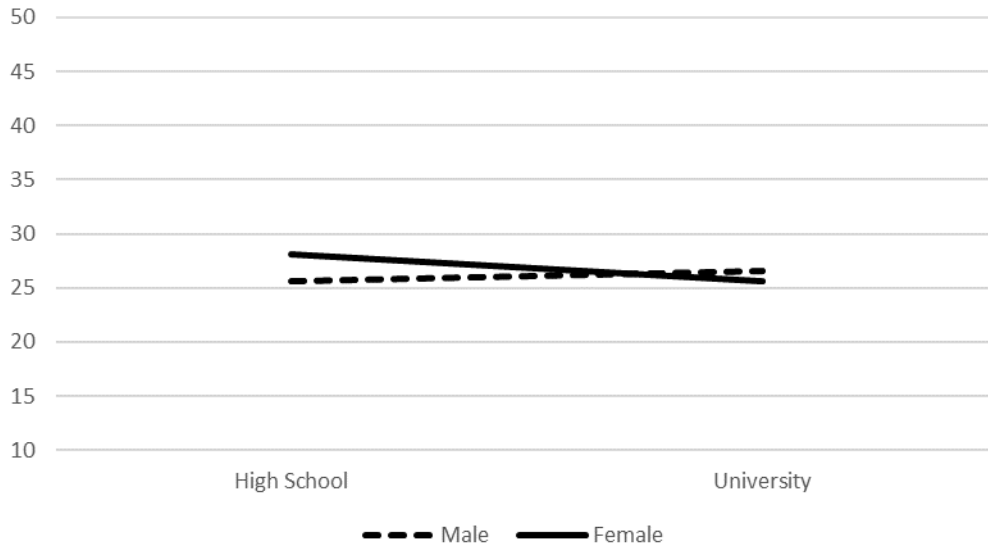
	SS	MS	F(df)	Sig.	PES
Gender	.689	.689	.020(1,148)	.887	.000
Education level	76.507	76.507	2.237(1,148)	.137	.015
Gender*Education	271.975	271.975	7.954(1,148)	.005	.051
Error(within-group)	5060.657	34.194			

Note: SS=Sum of squares, MS= Mean square, F(df)= F ratio (degrees of freedom); PES =Partial eta squared

Table 3: Estimated Marginal Means of FoMO

	Gender	Mean	Std. Error
High School	Female	28.089	.873
	Male	25.567	1.070
University	Female	23.957	.864
	Male	26.548	1.052

Figure 1: Estimated Marginal Means of FoMO



IV. Discussion

The current study aimed to check for the difference in FoMO at different age groups and also check for gender difference. The results showed that, as opposed to some previous findings (Beyens et al., 2016; Stead & Bibby, 2017), there were no gender differences in experiencing FoMO. In addition, it has been revealed by some studies (Blackwell et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2018), FoMO was associated with younger age, which is true for the current sample with high-school students who are in the younger age bracket scoring higher in the FoMO scale. An interaction was seen between gender and level of education, which revealed that levels of FoMO of females contrary to males was significantly different for two education levels. This partially supports earlier studies reporting higher FoMO in adolescents, and the decline could be related to increase in esteem and self-worth with age.

Implications

Unregulated contents and attachment to social media or phones, is leading to a ‘silent generation’ who only chat and need instant gratifications, the decrease in the span of attention and increased mental exhaustion are also the consequences of the same. Quality of content on social media, loneliness and needs of relatedness were found to be associated with increased social media use and FoMO was in a complex relationship with them, FoMO can result in procrastination and ignorance of important matters as one is stuck to their phone and indulging in mindless scrolling.

A comparative study between rural and urban youth can be done to check if this predominantly digital phenomenon is affecting individuals at different strata.

Limitation

The study was unable to take into account a majority of youth who are not students. The results were based on self-report and taken up through voluntary participation which could have confounded the outcome. There was equality of variance reported in screen-time, but other factors could not be matched. A larger and more representative sample could have been taken, but due to limited resources could not be achieved.

V. Conclusion

It was found that female high-school students in general felt highest levels of FoMO which could be related to their self-esteem as reported in many research. It could also be because of the type of social media content they are exposed to in their developing years, and unmet need of belongingness. Moderate levels of FoMO

was seen in all groups which could indicate an underlying feeling of being excluded, or using social media to get some vicarious satisfaction through the lived experience of others leading them to have high screen-times. Future studies could look more into long-term consequences of the same and could look for steps to mitigate such effects like spreading awareness about consequences and providing healthy space for real life interactions, especially in the current world which is said to be ‘chronically online’.

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