



A Study on Social Media Use, Psychological Wellbeing and Fear of Missing Out among Young Adults

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Abstract: Excessive social media use has become increasingly common among young adults, raising concerns about its effect on psychological wellbeing and fear of missing out (FOMO). The current research examined the link between excessive social media use, psychological wellbeing and FOMO and evaluated whether social media use influences wellbeing and FOMO. This study was conducted among 44 college students (23 females and 21 males) aged 18-24 years using. Data was obtained using the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), the Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013). And the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). The analysis revealed that excessive social media use was positively associated with FOMO and negatively associated with psychological wellbeing, while psychological well being showed a meaningful negative association with FOMO. No significant gender differences were identified, and psychological wellbeing neither mediated nor moderated the relationship between social media use and FOMO. The findings highlight that psychological wellbeing has a stronger influence in understanding FOMO, than social media use alone, emphasizing the need to promote healthy and balanced social media use and psychological well being among college students.

Keywords: *Psychological Wellbeing, FOMO, Social Media Use, College Students, Young Adults.*

1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential part of everyday life, particularly among college students, influencing communication, learning, and social interactions. Although it offers several benefits, excessive social media use has been associated with various psychological concerns, including reduced psychological well-being and increased Fear of Missing Out (Fear of Missing Out). As college students are among the most active users of social networking platforms, understanding the impact of excessive social media use on their psychological well-being and Fear of Missing Out has become an important area of psychological research.

1.1 Social Media Use

Excessive social media use is characterized by prolonged and uncontrolled engagement with social networking platforms, often interfering with academic performance, daily activities, and psychological functioning. College students represent one of the most active groups of social media users. Research has shown that excessive social media use is associated with poorer psychological well-being, increased stress, anxiety, and greater Fear of Missing Out (Fear of Missing Out), making it an important focus of contemporary psychological research.

1.2 Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's overall psychological functioning and ability to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life.

According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct consisting of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Psychological well-being is particularly important among college students, as it influences academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall mental health. However, excessive engagement with social media has been associated with increased stress, anxiety, emotional distress, and reduced life satisfaction, potentially affecting an individual's psychological well-being.

1.3 Fear of Missing Out (Fear of Missing Out)

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is used to describe a phenomenon observed on social networking sites. In 2013 British psychologists elaborated and defined it as “pervasive

apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent”, FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. FOMO includes two processes; firstly, perception of missing out, followed up with a compulsive behavior to maintain these social connections.

2. Review of Literature

Przybylski et al. (2013) did a study on Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out on 1,013 adults (672 men and 341 women) aged 18-62 years. The findings revealed that higher FOMO was associated with lower competence, autonomy, relatedness, life satisfaction, and mood, while being positively associated with greater social media engagement. The study concluded that unmet psychological needs contribute to higher FOMO, which in turn encourages excessive social media use.

Andreassen et al. (2017) studied The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem. The study included 23,532 Norwegian participants (Mean age = 35.8 years; age range = 16–88 years). The findings revealed that younger age, being female, being single, being a student, lower education, lower income, lower self-esteem, and higher narcissism were significantly associated with higher levels of addictive social media use.

Primack et al. (2017) conducted a study on Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the U.S. The study included 1,787 nationally representative U.S. young adults aged 19-32 years. The findings revealed that participants in the highest quartile of social media use had twice the odds of experiencing greater perceived social isolation based on time spent on social media (AOR = 2.0, 95% CI = 1.4–2.8) and more than three times the odds based on frequency of use (AOR = 3.4, 95% CI = 2.3–5.1; $p < .001$) compared to those in the lowest quartile.

Hunt et al. (2018) did a study titled “No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression” on 143 undergraduate students from the University of Pennsylvania. The study concluded that limiting social media use to approximately 30 minutes per day can significantly improve psychological well-being, providing experimental evidence for a causal relationship between reduced social media use and better mental health.

Keles et al. (2020) conducted A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. The review synthesized 13

empirical studies (12 cross-sectional and 1 longitudinal) involving adolescents aged 13–18 years from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Norway, Belgium, and Israel. The findings revealed a significant positive association between excessive social media use and depression, anxiety, and psychological distress.

Boer et al. (2021) did a study titled “Social media use intensity, social media use problems, and mental health among adolescents: Investigating directionality and mediating processes” on 2,109 secondary school adolescents (Mean age = 13.1 years, SD = 0.8) from the Netherlands. The findings revealed that problematic social media use predicted poorer mental health one year later, whereas social media use intensity alone was not associated with mental health over time. The researchers examined the bidirectional relationship between social media use intensity, problematic social media use, and mental health over one year.

Gupta and Sharma (2021) did a systematic literature review on “Fear of missing out: A brief overview of origin, theoretical underpinnings and relationship with mental health.” The findings revealed that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is significantly associated with problematic social media use, anxiety, depression, stress, poor sleep quality, reduced academic performance, impaired social functioning, neurodevelopmental disorders, and poorer physical well-being. The review also highlighted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as a promising intervention for reducing FOMO symptoms.

Elhai, J. D., Yang, H., & Montag, C. (2021) conducted a study on “Fear of missing out (FOMO): Overview, theoretical underpinnings, and literature review on relations with severity of negative affectivity and problematic technology use”. The review found that FoMO is consistently associated with higher levels of problematic technology use, excessive social networking site engagement, smartphone addiction, anxiety, depression, and stress. The authors also highlighted that unmet psychological needs and emotional dysregulation may contribute to the development of FoMO.

Tandon et al. (2021) did a study on “Fear of missing out (FOMO) among social media users: A systematic literature review, synthesis and framework for future research”. The findings revealed that FOMO is consistently associated with problematic social media use, smartphone addiction, anxiety, depression, stress, reduced sleep quality, and lower psychological well-being. The review systematically analyzed 58 empirical studies retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PsycINFO using systematic review protocols and content analysis.

Bányai et al. (2017) conducted a study titled “Problematic social media use: Results from a large-scale nationally representative adolescent sample”. The findings revealed that 4.5% of adolescents were classified as being at risk of problematic social media use. The study included 5,961 Hungarian adolescents (49.17% males; Mean age = 16.60 ± 0.94 years) selected from a nationally representative sample.

Kross et al. (2013) did a study on “Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults”. The study included 82 young adults (53 females; Mean age = 19.52 ± 2.17 years) from the University of Michigan, USA. The findings revealed that greater Facebook use predicted significant declines in both moment-to-moment affect ($B = .08$, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = -.124$, $p = .02$) over time.

Verduyn et al. (2017) did a study titled “Do social network sites enhance or undermine subjective well-being? A critical review”. The authors concluded that the impact of social media on well-being depends more on how individuals use social networking sites than on the amount of time spent using them, emphasizing that passive use is generally more detrimental to mental health. The review synthesized findings from existing empirical studies examining the relationship between social network site (SNS) use and subjective well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1 Problem

The study aims to examine effects of excessive use of social media on psychological well-being and Fear of Missing Out among College Students.

3.2 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between Social media use, Psychological wellbeing and fear of missing out among young adults.

3.3 Hypothesis

H1: The result will show significant positive relationship between Social media use and Psychological wellbeing.

H2: The result will show significant positive relationship between Social media use and Fear of missing out.

3.4 Sample

A total of 44 young adults within the age range of 18 to 24 years were included in the study from the city of Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula using a convenience sampling technique was utilized for data collection, allowing for accessible and efficient gathering of participant information within the target region.

3.5 Measures

The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS): Social media use/addiction.

The Fear of Missing Out Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013): Fear of Missing Out.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): Psychological well-being.

3.6 Procedure

Self-report questionnaire was given to young adults aged 18 to 26 and were asked to fill the correct option after reading the question. The questionnaires were distributed by google forms and instructions were given before each questionnaire.

4. Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics show the sample size, mean and SD of social media, psychological wellbeing and Fear of Missing Out.

	Gender	Social media use	Wellbeing	FOMO
N	Female	23	23	23
	Male	21	21	21
Mean	Female	17.1	16.4	23.1
	Male	17.4	16.1	23.8
Standard deviation	Female	4.46	2.86	8.15
	Male	3.64	3.40	6.87

Table 2. Shows correlation of social media, psychological wellbeing and Fear of Missing Out.

	Social media use	Wellbeing	FOMO
Social media use	—		

Wellbeing	-0.244	—	
FOMO	0.376	-0.486	—

Interpretation

The research found that Social media use was positively correlated with FOMO, ($r=0.37$), and FOMO was negatively correlated with wellbeing, ($r= -0.49$). Social media use showed a weak negative correlation with Wellbeing, ($r= -0.24$).

Table 3. Shows gender differences in social media, psychological wellbeing and Fear of Missing Out.

Group Descriptives						
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Social Media	Female	23	17.1	19.0	4.46	0.930
	Male	21	17.4	18.0	3.64	0.795
Wellbeing	Female	23	16.4	16.0	2.86	0.596
	Male	21	16.1	17.0	3.40	0.741
FOMO	Female	23	23.1	23.0	8.15	1.699
	Male	21	23.8	23.0	6.87	1.499

Interpretation

The research found out that there is no significant gender differences for social media use, $t(42)=-0.27, p=0.78$, wellbeing, $t(42)=0.30, p=0.75$ and FOMO, $t(42) = -0.29, p=0.76$.

5. Discussion of Result

The present study examined the relationship between social media use, psychological wellbeing, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among young adults, while also exploring the mediating and moderating role of psychological wellbeing. The findings indicated that social media use was positively associated with FOMO, suggesting that individuals who spend more time or engage more frequently with social media tend to experience higher levels of FOMO. Additionally, FOMO showed a moderate negative relationship with psychological wellbeing, indicating that greater FOMO is associated with poorer wellbeing. Although social media use was negatively related to wellbeing, this relationship was weak and not statistically significant.

The study also found no significant gender differences in social media use, psychological wellbeing, or FOMO, suggesting that male and female participants reported similar levels across all three variables. Overall, the findings suggest that while social media use is associated with increased FOMO, it is FOMO itself that has the strongest association with reduced psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing neither explains nor changes the relationship between social media use and FOMO in the present sample, but it remains an important protective factor against experiencing FOMO. The hypothesis suggesting a significant positive relationship between social media use and psychological well-being (H1), and between social media use and Fear of Missing Out (H2), were rejected. These findings suggest that higher levels of excessive social media use are associated with lower psychological well-being and increased Fear of Missing Out, indicating that excessive engagement with social media may adversely affect individuals' mental well-being and contribute to greater feelings of missing out on rewarding experiences.

Studies that promote our result include:

Stead, Hannah and Bibby (2017). Personality, Fear of Missing Out and problematic internet use. Reported that greater FOMO is associated with poorer mental health and lower psychological wellbeing. Supports: Negative correlation between FOMO and wellbeing ($r = -0.486$).

Kross et al. (2013). Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults. Found that increased Facebook use predicted declines in subjective wellbeing over time. Supports: Negative association between social media use and wellbeing.

Verduyn et al. (2017). Do Social Network Sites Enhance or Undermine Subjective Well-Being? A Critical Review. Reported that passive and excessive social media use is linked to lower wellbeing, although the relationship is often weak and depends on how social media is used. Supports: Your weak negative correlation ($r = -0.244$).

6. Conclusion and Future Implications

Fear of missing out tended to create a lot more trouble in young adults. In conclusion the present research examined the relationship between excessive social media use, psychological wellbeing and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among college students aged 17-24 years. The result revealed that excessive social media use was directly linked with FOMO and inversely related with psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing was also negatively correlated

with FOMO. No statistically significant gender differences were observed in social media use, psychological wellbeing or FOMO.

6.1 Suggestions

Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples and explore additional psychological variables such as self-esteem, loneliness and social support to gain deeper insight into the relationship between social media use, psychological wellbeing and FOMO.

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