



A study on Social Media Use, Fear of Missing Out & Social Rejection Sensitivity among Young Adults

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Abstract

Social media plays a vital role in shaping the identities through self-reflection and external feedback. Regular social media use can amplify the fear of missing out, exposing individuals to numerous potential social interactions. The fear of missing out (FOMO) is rooted in the desire for novelty and the inherent need for belongingness which can be disrupted by feelings of social exclusion or rejection. Those sensitive to social rejection may anticipate and react strongly to it, aggravating feelings of isolation and loneliness. However, continuous connectivity via social media offers a means to alleviate discomforts associated with social disconnection, rejection, loneliness and isolation by nurturing more profound relationships through continuous connectivity. A total sample of 40 young adults was collected in the age 18 to 30 years. Standardized scales were used. The purpose was to study the relationship of social media use, fear of missing out and social rejection sensitivity. The results found out that there is a positive significant relationship between Social Media Use, Fear of Missing Out and Social Rejection Sensitivity and no gender differences were found. Given that excessive social media use can negatively impact our well-being, promoting a reduction in screen-time is advisable.

Redirecting attention towards outdoor activities can offer benefits for both mental and physical health. This shift in focus may help mitigate the adverse effects associated with excessive screen time, such as heightened fear of missing out and sensitivity to social rejection. Fostering face-to-face interactions and cultivating hobbies unrelated to social media can provide alternative sources of fulfilment and connection.

Keywords: Social Media Use, Fear of Missing Out , Social Rejection Sensitivity, Young Adults

Introduction

“Social media is addictive precisely because it gives us something which the real world lacks: it gives us immediacy, direction, and value as an individual.”

~ David Amerland

The incorporation of social media has become an indispensable aspect of the daily routines of young adults. By soliciting feedback and facilitating the adjustment of self-representation, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping self-beliefs and perceived social norms. Social media encompasses various internet based platforms, both semi-public and public platforms, such as social networking sites, blogging, video sharing, along with associated tools that facilitate user profiles and the creation of user-generated content, fostering social interaction and sharing. Undoubtedly, for today's young adults, who have grown up with immediate access to social media, these platforms provide spaces and opportunities to connect with friends, alleviate social isolation and receive social support, while also offering possibilities for learning, creativity and self-fulfilment. It's natural for people to desire friendships and to be involved in enjoyable activities. This desire to stay connected and join in enjoyable experiences is something we feel from when we were very little, and it's not only about using social media.

In 2016, 97.5% of young adults in the United States reported using at least one social media site regularly (Villanti et al., 2016, 2017).

According to Kacker and Saurav (2020), a study was conducted to study the correlation between FOMO, Social media addiction, Personal relationships, Aggression and Anxiety. In the study brain electrical wave patterns were also studied and the tools used were FOMO and Social Media Addiction Questionnaire, Personal Relationship Questionnaire, Buss and Perry Aggression Scale and Zung Anxiety Scale. The results revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between FOMO, Social Media Addiction and Psychological Factors.

Although, FOMO has been implicated in driving problematic social network usage, it's unsurprising that compulsive users may experience FOMO as a consequence. Those who engage more frequently with social networks tend to display increased susceptibility to online vulnerability and higher levels of FOMO. FOMO is referred to as feeling uneasy and preoccupied with thoughts that friends or other people are having fun without you. This feeling comes from a wish to stay connected socially and can sometimes make you anxious. Continuous exposure to other's activities may foster a perception of missing out on a more fulfilling life. Consequently, the persistent connectivity offered by social media platforms could intensify FOMO, aligning with the reinforcement spiral model, wherein media content reinforces the needs that prompted its initial use, potentially leading to a cycle of behaviour challenging to satisfy in terms of control and social connection.

According to Li et al. (2024), a study was conducted to examine fear of missing out and social media use amongst young adults. This longitudinal study used a person-centered approach to differentiate fear of missing out among subgroups of individuals using latent-profile analysis

(LPA). The subgroups were identified according to trait-FOMO (a specific predisposition) and state-FOMO (a specific cognition in online context) items. The results revealed significant differences between profiles in terms of social media agreement, social media self-control failure, and problematic social media use and could be used to predict social media use behaviours of participants six months later. Further, it was seen that combination of high trait-FOMO and high state-FOMO may mean more frequent social media engagement and could be an important risk-factor for social media self-control failure and problematic social media use.

As social beings, humans depend on acceptance and support from others for survival and reproduction (Bowlby, 1969). The desire for acceptance and aversion to rejection are commonly posited as fundamental motivations in human social interactions (Maslow, 1987). Research suggests that humans possess inherent mechanisms to detect abandonment and rejection, enabling various responses such as distress or efforts to mitigate the effects (Bowlby, 1973). Responses to perceived rejection can also encompass emotional withdrawal, despondency, hostility and jealousy (Dodge & Somberg, 1987).

According to Meehan et al. (2018), a study was conducted on non-clinical young adults to examine the effect of rejection sensitivity on interpersonal behaviour. The results found out that those with high rejection sensitivity exhibited cold, unfriendly behaviour in response to their interaction partner's negative and subdued affect. Further, those with high rejection sensitivity were less agentically responsive to their interaction partner's agency and positive affect.

Social Media Use

We commonly adopted term Social media, to refer to “social networking sites-online platforms that allow individuals to create profiles, connect with other users, and view their list of

connections with others (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Although, social media technically refers to any platform in which users create and share content (e.g., YouTube, recipe websites) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).” Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.”

According to Chou and Edge (2012), a survey was conducted through a Questionnaire to study impact of using Facebook on the perception of other’s lives. The questionnaire included 3 perceptions- Others have a better life, others are happier and life is fair. The results found out that those who have used Facebook longer agreed more than others were happier, and agreed less that life is fair whereas those spending more time on Facebook each week agreed more than others were happier and had better lives. Furthermore, those that included more people whom they did not personally know as their Facebook friends agreed more than that of others had better lives.

Fear of Missing Out

Fear of Missing Out refers to the “pervasive apprehension that one might miss an opportunity for social interaction, potentially rewarding experiences, or satisfying events with others” (Przybylski et al., 2013). According to Alabri (2022) FOMO is “an all-consuming feeling that is associated with mental and emotional stress. Such strains are caused by a compulsive concern that one is missing an opportunity for a socially rewarding experience spotted on social media networks.”

According to Tomczyk and Lizde (2018), a research was conducted on 717 students to study the effect of FOMO among them. The results indicated that 20 percent of young respondents (average age of 13 years) showed several symptoms of FOMO whereas another 30 percent

were at risk of being addicted to Internet. Further, it was seen that 50 percent were not at risk of Internet addiction. Furthermore, it was also observed that FOMO did not depend on gender and could be minimized by some forms of leisure activity.

Social Rejection Sensitivity

According to Downey and Feldman (1996), rejection sensitivity is a “cognitive-affective disposition to anxiously expect, readily perceive and intensely react to rejection.”

According to Minihan et al. (2023), a study was conducted on social rejection sensitivity and its role in adolescent emotional disorder symptomatology. The results indicated that social rejection sensitivity was associated with perceived parental rejection, while controlling for other maladaptive parenting. Further, social rejection sensitivity partially accounted for variance in the relationship between perceived parental rejection and emotional disorder symptomatology, as well as the relationship between negative interpretation bias and emotional disorder symptoms.

According to Andrews et al. (2022), a study was conducted across four separate samples (12-89 years) including a total of 2381 sample, to measure online and offline social rejection sensitivity in digital age. The results indicated that rejection sensitivity across online and offline social environments shows a strong association with depressive symptoms and maladaptive ruminating brooding. It was also found out that age-related differences in social rejection sensitivity in online and offline contexts with rejection sensitivity decreased from early adolescence to older age.

Purpose

The purpose is to study social media use, fear of missing out and social rejection sensitivity among young adults.

Hypothesis

- There will be a positive correlation between Comparison-Based Social media use and Fear of Missing out among young adults.
- There will be a positive correlation between Social rejection sensitivity and Fear of Missing out among young adults.
- There will be a positive correlation between Consumption-Based Social media use, Image-Based Social media use and Comparison-Based Social media use among young adults.
- There will be a positive correlation between Social rejection sensitivity and Consumption-Based Social media use among young adults.

Methods

Sample

A total sample of 40 young adults (aged 18-30), both males and females was collected from City Chandigarh.

Measures

- **Social Media Use Scale:** The scale is developed by Tuck and Thompson (2023). The scale is used to measure the usage of social media by people on daily basis. The scale

consists of total 17 items, consisting of 4 Sub dimensions (Image-based, Comparison-based, Belief-based, Consumption-based). The scale used a Likert of (1)Never, (2) 1-2 times per week, (3) 3-4 times per week, (4) 5-6 times per week, (5) Once daily, (6) 2-5 times daily, (7) 6-9 times daily, (8) 10-13 times daily, (9) Hourly or more. There were no reverse-keyed items.

- **Fear of Missing Out Scale:** The scale is developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). The scale is used to measure how much someone worries about not being part of social events, especially with friends and uses social media a lot to stay connected. The scale consists of total 10 items and used 5-point Likert scale that ranges from (1) Not at all true of me to (5) Extremely true of me.
- **Social Rejection Sensitivity Scale:** The scale is developed by Andrews et al. (2022). The scale is used to measure online and offline social rejection sensitivity scale. The scale is used to measure social rejection sensitivity in both online and offline environments. The scale consists of 18 items and used 5-point Likert scale that ranges from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree.

Procedure

The participants were given standardized scale. The data was collected through Google forms. The participants were assured of confidentiality and finally, each participant was thanked for their cooperation.

Analysis of Data

Results

The responses of participants were analysed to see effects of Social Media Use on FOMO and Social Rejection Sensitivity. N, Mean and Standard Deviation are presented in Table 1. Table 2 shows the correlation between FOMO, Social Media Use Subscales (Image-based, Comparison-based, Belief-based and Consumption-based) and Social Rejection Sensitivity.

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	FOMO	Image	Comparison	Belief	Consumption	Social Rejection Sensitivity
N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Mean	21.7	1.90	2.15	1.32	3.98	27.2
Standard Deviation	5.68	0.940	1.30	0.325	1.73	8.40

TABLE 2

Correlation between FOMO, Social media use subscales (Image-based, Comparison-based, Belief-based and Consumption-based) and Social Rejection Sensitivity

	FOMO	Image	Comparison	Belief	Consumption	Social Rejection Sensitivity
FOMO	—					
Image	0.130	—				
Comparison	0.343 *	0.114	—			
Belief	- 0.042	0.111	0.046	—		
Consumption	0.068	0.522 ***	0.395 *	0.245	—	
Social rejection sensitivity	0.490 **	0.292	0.248	- 0.005	0.362 *	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion of Results

The results found out that there is a significant positive correlation between Comparison-Based Social media use and Fear of missing out ($r=0.343$, $p<.05$). The results also found out that Social rejection sensitivity is significantly positively correlated with Fear of missing out ($r=0.490$, $p<.01$). Further, significant positive correlation between Consumption-Based Social media use and Image-Based Social media ($r=0.522$, $p<.001$) was found. Additionally, Consumption Based Social Media and Comparison-Based Social media had a significant positive relationship ($r=0.395$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, it was found out that Social rejection sensitivity is positively correlated with Consumption-Based Social media use ($r=0.362$, $p<.05$). Hence, the hypothesis that there will be a positive correlation between Comparison-Based Social media use and Fear of missing out is accepted. The hypothesis that Social rejection sensitivity is positively correlated with Fear of missing out was also accepted. Further, significant relationship is seen between Consumption-Based Social media use, Image-Based Social media use and Comparison-Based social media use. The significant relationship is also seen between Social rejection sensitivity and Consumption-Based Social media use.

According to an International report published on Health Behaviour of School-aged Children, which covered the health and health behaviour of 11, 13 & 15 years old adolescents in 45 countries, found out that 7% of adolescents reported problematic social media use. Further, 35% of adolescents could be characterized as intensive electronic media users, having online contact with people almost all the time and throughout the day (Paakkari et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of Social media use on Fear of missing out and Social rejection sensitivity among Young adults. The results found out that there was a

positive significant relationship between Social media use, Fear of missing out and Social rejection sensitivity.

Various approaches that can be undertaken to reduce screen-time among young adults is firstly, to establish specific times during the day dedicated to social media use and limit access outside the designated period. Secondly, replacing social media browsing with productive or enjoyable activities, such as reading, exercising, engaging in outdoor-activities such as playing favourite sport. Third, implementing 20-20-20 rule and adhere to it. In this technique, where every 20 minutes spent using digital devices, take a 20 seconds break to look at something 20 feet away. This technique can mitigate the eye strain and reduce the likelihood of prolonged social media use. Next, self-control techniques can be employed such as self-monitoring, goal-setting and rewarding yourself for meeting social media use reduction targets. Additionally, practising mindfulness which can help in developing awareness of social media usage patterns and their impact on productivity and mental well-being. Lastly, optimized phone settings by adjusting smartphone settings to minimize notifications from social media apps, enabling a less intrusive digital environment. By doing so, habitual checking of social media can be decreased. It is also important to acknowledge various limitations of this study. Further investigation could explore the impact of social media use on attention, focus, learning, cognition and emotions. Moreover, further research could also delve into mental health consequences associated with prolonged social media use.

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