



Study on Fear of Missing out, Loneliness and Social Adjustment among University Students

Smriti Rekha Boruah, Masters of Science, Clinical Psychology, Yenepoya (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Smritiboruah2002@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is the tendency of individual to remain connected and updated with what others behave and think. During their academic life, students may find themselves disconnected from real social life interactions and wish for a unique platform of social support. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between fear of missing out (FOMO), loneliness and social adjustment among university students. The study adopted a descriptive correlational design. The total sample size was 81 university students aged between 18 to 25 years. Standardized scale was used to measure fom0, loneliness and social adjustment. The result found out a significant positive correlation among all the stated three variables.

Keywords: *Fear of missing out, Loneliness, Social adjustment, University students*

INTRODUCTION

Fear of missing out is a social anxiety driven by the ability to observe others' lives and experiences, often through social media. It involves a fear that one is missing out on something interesting, exciting or potentially valuable happening elsewhere. FOMO is the apprehensive feeling that one is being left out of positive experiences that others seem to be having. Fear of Missing out is defined as "a pervasive apprehensive that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013). Blum defined FOMO as "as seeing the photos of one's friends on social media platforms, not seeing herself/himself in the photos and therefore feeling negative emotions." Additionally, FOMO is defined as "the concern that people have happier, more interesting, and enjoyable lives. People can experience this anxiety in all areas of their lives while sitting on the bus, at the dinner table or home. This situation can affect a person's whole life" (Cohen, 2013).

Loneliness is a subjective feeling of lack of meaningful social connections, rather than just being alone physically. Loneliness is a deeply painful and distressing emotional experience that occurs when a person's social relations are deficient in some important way." Loneliness is defined as "the negative subjective experience resulting from a discrepancy between the desire and achieved levels of interpersonal relationship" (DeJong-Gierveld & Tilburg, 1999; Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner, 1978). Further, loneliness is defined as "a subjective feeling state of being alone, separate or apart from others, and has been conceptualized as an imbalance between desired social contacts and actual social contacts" (Gardiner et al., 2018). According to Rokasch (2013) Loneliness is in essence a subjective experience that is influenced by personal and situational variables."

Social Adjustments are the adaptive changes people make to their social functioning to effectively integrate into different social contexts throughout their lives. Adjustment to a new culture or society typically requires learning new languages, customs, values and ways of interacting socially. It's also involved modifying one's behavior's, attitudes, thoughts and emotions to fit social norms, expectations and demands of a particular setting or group.

Social adjustment is defined "as the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behavior and adapts to the immediate social context" (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Siantz de Leon (1997) defined "social adjustment as "a person's skill to involve friends, family, and adults in a sociable and supportive way and to be creative and achievement oriented."

Fear of Missing Out and Loneliness

The research by Huynh et al. (2020) done during the pandemic, provides interesting insights into how social media and messaging application usage was impacted during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, and how that differential usage related to feelings of loneliness. Social network usage increased as lockdowns were initiated, likely as people sought to maintain connections when face-to-face social interaction was limited. However, increased social network usage was associated with increased feelings of loneliness, mediated by fear of missing out (FOMO) - perhaps seeing others' activities heightened feelings of isolation. In contrast, messaging application usage was associated with decreased loneliness and was unrelated to FOMO, suggesting messaging apps provided more direct social connection. The results highlight that for mitigating loneliness during isolation, promoting messaging/VoIP app usage may be more beneficial than social networking apps which can paradoxically heighten loneliness through FOMO effects. Overall, this multi-country study provides valuable insights

into how different forms of technology usage impacted psychological experiences during the pandemic lockdowns. Promoting technologies that provide more direct social interaction appears key for combating isolation-induced loneliness.

This experimental study by Hunt et al. (2018) provides valuable causal evidence on the effects of limiting social media usage on well-being outcomes like loneliness, depression, anxiety, and fear of missing out (FOMO). 143 undergrads randomly assigned to either limit Facebook/Instagram/Snapchat to 10 mins per day per platform or use social media as normal for 3 weeks. Baseline monitoring occurred for 1 week prior. The limited social media use group showed significant reductions in loneliness and depression over 3 weeks compared to control group. Both groups showed reduced anxiety and FOMO over baseline, suggesting self-monitoring benefit. The strength of this study is the experimental random assignment design, allowing causal inferences. The findings suggest: Limiting overall social media use to around 30 minutes per day can lead to improved well-being, specifically reducing loneliness and depressive symptoms. Simply increasing self-monitoring of social media use may help reduce anxiety and FOMO, regardless of actual usage level. The negative well-being correlates of social media use appear to be dosage-dependent - limited use is better than unlimited use. While complete abstinence from social media may not be realistic or desirable for most, this study provides evidence that conscious time-limited usage could have mental health benefits by reducing pernicious effects like loneliness and depression. Setting reasonable daily limits appears to be a pragmatic well-being intervention.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), the anxiety over missing exciting or interesting events, was investigated in relation to age, gender, and personality traits in a study involving 3,370 German by Rozgonjuk et al. (2021). The results revealed no significant gender differences in

experiencing FOMO. However, younger individuals exhibited higher FOMO scores, indicating a stronger fear of missing out among this age group. As for personality traits, the Neuroticism domain and its facets positively correlated with FOMO, while other personality traits such as Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were negatively associated with FOMO at the domain level, albeit with small correlations. Notably, in addition to Neuroticism, Conscientiousness demonstrated consistent negative, albeit small, links with FOMO across domain, facet, and item levels.

According to Agarwal and Mewafarosh (2021) study aimed to examine the interplay between fear of missing out (FOMO), social engagement, and subjective well-being among college students. Specifically, it investigates whether FOMO acted as a mediating factor in the relationship between social engagement and subjective well-being. The data was collected from 324 undergraduate and postgraduate students across various fields such as engineering, management, and pharmaceutical sciences. The research model developed for this study proposes that there is a relationship between social engagement, FOMO, and subjective well-being among students. The study intends to lend support to previous research in this area by demonstrating the robust mediating role that FOMO plays in the present age, influencing the link between social engagement and subjective well-being of students.

Fear of Missing out and Social Adjustment

Dou, Li and Wang (2023) investigated an important phenomenon, the fear of missing out (FOMO), among college students in China. The authors explored how perceived social support may help mitigate FOMO through its effects on basic psychological needs and perceived stress. Perceived social support was negatively associated with FOMO among the 806 college students

surveyed. Higher levels of perceived support from one's social network were linked to lower levels of FOMO. Basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) partially mediated the relationship between perceived social support and FOMO. Overall, the results suggest that strong perceived social support can help fulfill basic psychological needs, which in turn reduces vulnerability to experiencing FOMO, especially among those under higher stress. This provides insight into some of the underlying mechanisms linking social support to reduced FOMO. A few implications: Bolstering perceptions of social support (e.g. through campus programs, counseling) may be protective against FOMO development among students. Meeting basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness appears to be one key pathway through which social support mitigates FOMO tendencies. The authors suggest that addressing perceived stress levels may be important for maximizing the FOMO-reducing benefits of need satisfaction through social support.

The study provides insights into the social adjustment experiences of first-year students in professionally oriented higher education programs, which have been understudied compared to traditional academic programs. By employing a qualitative critical incidents approach with 104 freshmen students, the researchers identified five key themes related to social adjustment that students reported across their first semester: a) dealing with the unknown, b) establishing a first connection, c) establishing a deeper connection, d) support from peers and others, and e) loneliness. Notably, a quantitative analysis revealed that the salience of these different themes varied across different time points in the first semester, suggesting social adjustment is a dynamic process. The findings highlight that universities can better structure guidance, coaching, and support initiatives to address the key social adjustment hurdles at different stages, such as

facilitating initial connections early on, then deepening those connections and providing ongoing monitoring for students at risk of loneliness (Wilems et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose is to study Fear of Missing out, loneliness, and social adjustment among university students.

Hypothesis

- There will be a significant positive relationship between fear of missing out and loneliness among university students.
- There will be a significant positive relationship between fear of missing out and social adjustment among university students.
- There will be a significant positive relationship between loneliness and social adjustment.

Methods

Sample

A total sample of 81 young adults in the age range of 18-25 years was collected from the city Bengaluru.

Measures

- ***Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMO)***

The scale was developed by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013). The scale consists of a 10-item unidimensional scale. It is a 5-point Likert scale with responses: 1= Not at all true of me, 2= Slightly true of me, 3= Moderately true of me, 4= Very true of me, 5= Extremely true of me.

- ***A Short- Form Measures of Loneliness (UL-8)***

The scale was developed by Hays and DiMatteo (1987). The scale consists of 10 items, with a response scale of 4-point, 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Always.

- ***Brief Adjustment Scale-6 (BASE-6)***

The BASE-6 is a brief self-report measure of general psychological adjustment developed for stand-alone use and as part of a measurement feedback system for ROM (Smith et al., 2011; currently called Owl Outcomes). The item pool contains six items and assesses individuals' perceptions of emotional distress (three items: depression, anxiety and, anger) and related interference (three items: self-esteem, personal relationships, and occupational functioning). All six items were on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 4 = somewhat, 7 = extremely), higher scores indicating lower general psychological adjustment. Completion of the BASE-6 required approximately one minute.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google Forms; each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

The research employed Jamovi software for data analysis. Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to study the relationship between the variables.

RESULTS

Table 1

N, Mean and Standard deviation

	Fear of missing out		Loneliness		Social Adjustment	
N		81		81		81
Mean		23.2		20.0		23.2
Standard deviation		6.95		4.53		8.38

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics based on a sample of 81 students for three variables Fear of missing out, Loneliness and Social Adjustment. With an average FOMO score of 23.2 and a standard deviation of 6.95, the results show a moderate level of suffering with significant individual variability. In FOMO, the mean score for loneliness is lower at 20.0, with a standard deviation of 4.53. On the other hand, compared to FOMO and loneliness, Social Adjustment the mean score is 23.2 and standard deviation of 8.38 which means the Social Adjustment is higher than FOMO and loneliness. These figures give an overview of the central tendency and distribution of each of these variables within the study population, revealing information about the participants range and variability in terms of overall FOMO, Loneliness and Social Adjustment.

Table 2*Correlation between Fear of missing out, Loneliness and Social Adjustment*

	Fear of missing out		Loneliness		Social Adjustment	
Fear of missing out	—					
Loneliness	0.494	***	—			
Social Adjustment	0.343	**	0.527	***	—	
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$						

DISCUSSION

Fear of Missing out and Loneliness: Based on correlation statistical analysis, the results found that there is a significant positive correlation between fear of missing out and loneliness ($r = 0.494$, $p < 0.001$). The result of the present study supports the hypothesis that there will be a significant positive relationship between fear of missing out and loneliness. The study implies that when student experience higher level of FOMO, they tend to feel lonelier as they may believe that their friends are involved in social activities. The results are consistent with previous research that conducted to study the 447 students from Urmia University of Medical Sciences were investigated. Data were collected using demographic questionnaires, Przybylski's FOMO scale. The outcome of the study depicted a positive correlation between FOMO and loneliness (Alinejad et al., 2002). In another study the correlations FOMO and loneliness were assessing.

The study was done on 509 adults from over 40 states in the United States. The result is consistent with a positive relationship between social loneliness and FOMO (Rippe et al., 2023).

Fear of missing out and Social Adjustment: Similarly, there is a significant positive correlation between FOMO and social adjustment ($r = 0.343$, $p < 0.01$). Though the hypothesis is accepted that there will be a significant positive relationship between FOMO and social adjustment. This aligns with a previous study conducted by Qutishat et al. (2020) on 339 undergraduate students from Sultan Qaboos University colleges who discovered a positive significant correlation between the FOMO and social adjustment.

Social Adjustment and Loneliness: Finding from descriptive statistics indicates that there is a positive significant relationship between social adjustment and loneliness ($r = 0.527$, $p < 0.001$). As a result, third hypothesis is accepted that there will a positive significant relationship between social and loneliness. According to the early research findings, there is no significant relationship between social adjustment and loneliness among students (Morin, 2020). Another study found that, there is no significant positive relationship between social adjustment and loneliness (Ribeiro et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The current study was investigated with an aim to study Fear of Missing out, loneliness, and social adjustment among university students. The study was conducted on 81university students with various colleges and university. The result found out that there is significant positive relationship between all the variables FOMO, loneliness and social adjustment. Descriptive analysis was done by mean, standard deviation in table. And Pearson correlation was

done to find the correlation between FOMO, Loneliness and Social Adjustment. The finding underscores the importance of FOMO as a significant factor in understanding loneliness and social adjustment in students.

The result of this study can be utilized while designing interventions for individuals to reduce adjustment related problems and will be helpful to understand students' perception about their level of FOMO, loneliness and social adjustment.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, S., & Mewafarosh, R. (2021). Linkage of social media engagement with fomo and subjective well being. *Journal of Content, Community & Communication*, 13(7), 46-57.
- Dong, Y., Wang, H., Luan, F., Li, Z., & Cheng, L. (2021). How children feel matters: teacher–student relationship as an indirect role between interpersonal trust and social adjustment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 581235.
- Gazo, A. M., Mahasneh, A. M., Abood, M. H., & Muhediat, F. A. (2020). Social self-efficacy and its relationship to loneliness and internet addiction among hashemite university students. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(2), 144-155.
- Kurniawan, C. N., & Susilo, E. A. (2024). Antecedents and Consequences of FOMO in Tourism: an Empirical Literature Review. *PROFIT: JURNAL ADMINISTRASI BISNIS*, 18(1), 97-109.
- Morin, A. H. (2020). Teacher support and the social classroom environment as predictors of student loneliness. *Social psychology of education*, 23(6), 1687-1707.
- O’Brien, O., Sumich, A., Baguley, T., & Kuss, D. J. (2023). A partial correlation network indicates links between wellbeing, loneliness, FOMO and problematic internet use in university students. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 42(16), 2717-2734.
- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- Qutishat, M. G. M. (2020). Academic adjustment, emotional intelligence, and fear of missing out among undergraduate students: A descriptive correlational study. *Oman Medical Journal*, 35(5), e174.

- Ribeiro, O., Freitas, M., Rubin, K. H., & Santos, A. J. (2023). Loneliness Profiles in Adolescence: Associations with Sex and Social Adjustment to the Peer Group. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32(4), 1204-1217.
- Rippé, C. B., Smith, B., & Gala, P. (2023). A psychological examination of attachment insecurity, loneliness, and fear of missing out as drivers of retail patronage among emerging adults. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(5), 1838-1852.
- Rozgonjuk, D., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Montag, C. (2021). Individual differences in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO): Age, gender, and the Big Five personality trait domains, facets, and items. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 171, 110546.
- Thomas, L., Orme, E., & Kerrigan, F. (2020). Student loneliness: The role of social media through life transitions. *Computers & Education*, 146, 103754.
- Tugtekin, U., Barut Tugtekin, E., Kurt, A. A., & Demir, K. (2020). Associations between fear of missing out, problematic smartphone use, and social networking services fatigue among young adults. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(4), 2056305120963760.
- Veazie, S., Gilbert, J., Winchell, K., Paynter, R., & Guise, J. (n.d.). *Table F-1, Definitions of social isolation and loneliness - Addressing Social Isolation To Improve the Health of Older Adults: A Rapid Review - NCBI Bookshelf*.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK537897/table/appf.tab1/#:~:text=Loneliness%3A%20A%20subjective%20feeling%20state,contacts%20and%20actual%20social%20contacts.&text=Social%20isolation%3A%20An%20objective%20lack%20of%20meaningful%20and%20sustained%20communication>

Zhang, G., Tu, X., Ding, N., Lau, J. T., Wang, P., & Yang, X. (2023). Prospective relationships between college adjustment, self-esteem, and mental health status among Chinese undergraduates. *Journal of American College Health*, 71(3), 844-850.