



Fear of Missing Out and Social Anxiety among Young Adults: A Correlation Study

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ABSTRACT

In the era of constant digital connectivity, psychological constructs such as Social Anxiety and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) have become critical areas of research. The present study aimed to discern the correlation between FoMO and social anxiety among young adults. FoMO refers to a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013), whereas social phobia is a dual-component problem; it is the combination of being afraid of social or performance situations and actively avoiding them (Liebowitz, 1987). Data were collected from 120 participants belonging to the age group of 18-25 years from the Delhi NCR region using purposive sampling. Participants were primarily college students, with a ratio of 62.5% females and 35.8% males. Measures included the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013) and the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) (Liebowitz, 1987). Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed after confirming assumptions of normality and the absence of extreme outliers. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between social anxiety and FoMO ($r = .54, p < .01; 95\% \text{ CI } .40, .66$), representing a moderate-to-strong effect size. No additional control variables (e.g., age, time spent on social media) were included. As the study used a cross-sectional design, directionality and causality cannot be inferred. This study highlights the need for further research to



explore the directionality of this relationship and suggests practical implications for reducing social anxiety in its early stages through the development and implementation of targeted interventions.

Introduction:-

Many young adults today seem to be navigating a complex mix of constant social media engagement, the fear of missing out, attachment needs and growing anxiety in social situations. While the life of every individual is filled with subjective emotions, the transition to young adulthood, marked by intense peer influence and heavy reliance on digital platforms, makes attachment-driven sensitivities especially relevant. Anxiously attached individuals, who fear abandonment and crave reassurance, may be more prone to the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), as they closely monitor others' activities to avoid feeling left out. Avoidantly attached individuals, who experience discomfort with closeness, may be more vulnerable to social anxiety in both online and offline social situations (Read et al., 2018).

These attachment-based struggles often blend with the social pressures young people face today. Przybylski et al. (2013) made the most influential academic contribution to the study of FoMO. "FoMO refers to a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent."

This discomfort with closeness and fear of being judged can also interact with modern psychological pressures that make people feel even more socially stressed. Social Anxiety Disorder (which is commonly known as Social Phobia) is a dual-component problem; it is the combination of being afraid of social or performance situations and actively avoiding them (Liebowitz, 1987).

Research on FoMO has grown rapidly, particularly as young adults increasingly rely on digital platforms. Przybylski et al. (2013) showed it to be a strong predictor of problematic social media use and unmet psychological needs. Subsequent studies link FoMO with emotional instability, compulsive online engagement, and heightened social comparison. Young adults who frequently monitor others online often report greater stress, reduced well-being, and higher anxiety.

Social Anxiety, described by Liebowitz (1987), can be intensified by online environments that amplify judgment and peer comparison. Research indicates a positive association between FoMO and social anxiety, suggesting that pressure to stay constantly connected may increase feelings of inadequacy.



Attachment tendencies further shape how young adults interpret online cues, influencing both FoMO and social anxiety. However, more research is needed within the Indian context.

A major limitation in current research is that most studies are cross-sectional, showing FoMO and social anxiety are linked but not revealing which comes first. Further research is needed to understand this direction. Another gap lies in treating social media use as a single activity. Passive scrolling and active posting create very different emotional experiences, yet they are often grouped. Future studies must examine these behaviours separately for deeper insight.

Despite the rapid rise of FoMO among young adults, there is limited empirical evidence on how it contributes to social anxiety within the Indian socio-cultural context. Since young adulthood is already marked by identity exploration, peer sensitivity, and increased digital dependence, examining the FoMO–social anxiety link can help clarify the psychological mechanisms that place young adults at risk.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between the Fear of Missing Out and Social Anxiety among Young Adults.

Method

Aim

The present study aimed to discern the correlation between FoMO and social anxiety in young adults.

Sample

A sample of 120 literate participants belonging to the age group of 18-25 years from the Delhi-NCR region was chosen. Purposive sampling was used as this technique allowed for the targeted selection of individuals relevant to the study objectives.

Tools

1. *The Fear of Missing Out Scale*

It was developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) and was used to assess participants' levels of FoMO. The scale consists of 10 items that measure individuals' apprehension about missing rewarding experiences. The FoMO Scale demonstrates strong reliability, with high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$). It also shows good construct, convergent, and discriminant validity, indicating that it accurately measures the experience of FoMO.



2. *The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale*

It was developed by Liebowitz in 1987, was administered to assess social anxiety levels. Out of the 24 items, 13 items assess Performance Anxiety, and 11 items are related to social situations. Similarly, the Scale shows excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.90-0.95$) and strong content, criterion, and construct validity, confirming its effectiveness in assessing social anxiety.

Procedure

The data collection process was conducted entirely through Google Forms, which enabled convenient and wide-reaching access to the target population, especially given the age group's familiarity with digital platforms. Participants were reassured of their voluntary participation and the privacy and confidentiality of their responses before completing the questionnaires.

Results

The collected data were analysed using SPSS, employing Pearson's coefficient of correlation to examine the relationship between FoMO and social anxiety.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

| Variables | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-----------|--------|---|
| 1. FoMO | 120 | 2.37 | 0.77 | - | |
| 2. Social Anxiety | 120 | 28.21 | 15.70 | .54*** | - |

*** $p < .001$

Table 1 revealed that Fear of Missing Out has a significant positive correlation with Social Anxiety ($r = .54, p < .001$). This suggests that higher levels of FoMO are associated with higher levels of social anxiety.

Discussion

The present study explored the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and social anxiety among young adults and found a significant positive correlation between the two variables. The findings could suggest that individuals who experience higher levels of FoMO are more likely to report elevated levels of social anxiety. In addition, heightened vigilance toward online activities can increase pressure to stay socially connected, ultimately contributing to greater anxiety in both online and offline situations.



These findings align with previous research. Przybylski et al. (2013) identified FoMO as a predictor of emotional instability and problematic social media engagement, demonstrating that the need to stay connected can negatively impact well-being. Similarly, Liebowitz (1987) highlighted that social anxiety arises from fear of judgment and avoidance behaviours, which may be intensified by constant peer comparison in digital contexts.

Together, these ideas show how FoMO, worries about judgment, and digital pressures can blend to make social anxiety worse. Adding to this, recent studies have found similar patterns, strengthening this connection. The results of the present study align with emerging evidence in the literature. A recent cross-sectional study in the *International Journal of Indian Psychology* found a significant relationship between FoMO and social interaction anxiety among young adults (Vaishnavi et al., 2025). Experimental research has also shown that concerns over missing group bonding events amplify FoMO, especially among individuals with anxious attachment patterns (Rifkin et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, the study's cross-sectional design prevents establishing causation. Future research should employ more detailed methods and examine different types of social media behaviour separately.

Implications

The findings of this study point to the importance of supporting young adults in managing FoMO and the anxiety that often accompanies it. Encouraging healthier online habits through early interventions and digital wellness programs can make a meaningful difference. For mental health professionals, being attentive to FoMO levels during assessments may help them understand the emotional pressures young adults face, allowing them to incorporate practical coping and stress-management techniques into therapy.

Colleges can conduct workshops on healthy habits and reducing social comparison, and building self-esteem. Interventions may benefit from addressing attachment and insecurities that increase vulnerability to FoMO and anxiety.

Further studies are required to determine the causal relationship between FoMO and social anxiety. Identifying individuals who experience high FoMO or social anxiety early on may also help prevent these patterns from developing into more serious mental health challenges or more severe psychological difficulties.



Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and social anxiety among young adults. Using scales, including the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013) and the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) (Liebowitz, 1987), and a purposive sample of 120 participants. The data was collected entirely through Google Forms for a wider reach. The findings showed a significant positive correlation between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and social anxiety. Analysis revealed that individuals who frequently worry about missing out on social experiences may also experience heightened discomfort in social situations. While the correlational design limits causal interpretation, the findings highlight the need for further research and early interventions that address FoMO-related stress and prevent social anxiety from converting into an anxiety disorder.

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