



The Toll of FoMO and Social Comparison: Examining Their Impact of University Students' Psychological Well-being

¹Harsha Yadav

B.Sc. Psychology, Department of Psychology, School of Health Sciences, Sushant University, Gurugram

ABSTRACT

FoMO and social comparison are two common terms that are generally recognized among university students and has an impact on their psychological well-being. The study investigates the influence of fear of escape (FoMO) and Social Comparison on university students' Psychological Well-being. This study aims to uncover the extent to which these factors contribute to student's general mental health through a comprehensive review and empirical analysis of existing literature by examining the prevalence of FoMO and Social Comparison in university. The sample consisted of hundred university students (N=100) pursuing bachelors or undergraduate courses from various universities of Delhi NCR. The sampling was based on random sampling method. The data was collected using questionnaire method and the tools used were Fear Of Missing Out Scale (FOMOS), Social comparison Scale (SCS) and Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS). This study has adopted an exploratory research design and employed regression analysis. Regression analysis is used in the study to look at how social comparison and FoMO negatively affect students' mental health. Research suggests that stress and anxiety can be increased by comparing oneself to peers in terms of accomplishments, attractiveness, or way of life. This is made worse by FoMO, which intensifies the pressure to keep up with others and results in a lowered sense of self-worth and self-esteem. According to the study, these actions might obstruct one's own growth and perpetuate a vicious cycle of unhappiness and inertia. Digital connectedness and excessive social media use also intensify these harmful impacts. In order to lessen these effects, the research emphasizes the significance of setting up sound boundaries and developing self-awareness and self-compassion. To encourage good mental health outcomes and resistance against social comparison and fear of missing out, it is essential to foster a supportive and genuine atmosphere in social circles and educational environments.

Keywords: FoMO, Social comparison, Psychological Well-Being, University students

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century the use of social media is an ever increasing phenomenon. Young individuals pervasively use social media for a variety of reasons which include entertainment, identity formation, social enhancement (argumenting offline social status through online interactions) and most importantly maintaining interpersonal connections. (Bekalu et al,2019) Social comparison and social media are closely linked. Social media platforms provide a platform for people to present versions of their lives in a systematic manner, often highlighting their achievements and positive experience. This often leads to social comparison where individuals compare themselves to others they see on social media. Social comparison refers to “a behaviour where an individual compare certain aspects of themselves (behaviour, opinions, status, and success) to other people so that individual have a better assessment of themselves”(Buunk et al.,2007). The concept was first termed and fully developed by Festinger (1954) who hypothesized that people are not able to self-judge their opinions and abilities accurately and instead rely on comparing themselves to other people to form an evaluation Nortj (2023). It's a natural and common human tendency to examine or assess one's own qualities and well-being in relation to others in order to measure their self worth and social standings. Social comparisons can occur in various highlights of life, including appearance, achievements, relationships and social status. It can have both negative and positive effects on psychological well-being on an individual. Social Comparison theory describes the comparison process that people use to evaluate their actions, achievements, and their related opinions of others. There are two kinds of social comparison-upward social comparison and downward social comparison.(MSEd,2022):

- **Upward social comparison**-This happens when individual compares self to those they believe are better than them. These upward comparison often focus on the desire to improve our current situation or level of competence. Individuals can compare selves to a better person and look for ways to achieve similar results.
- **Downward social comparison**-This happens when an individual compares selves to others who are worse than them. Such low comparison are often intended to make individual feel better about their abilities or qualities. They may not be good at something, but at least they are better than someone else.

Social comparison is based on various factors but one of the most important factors is FoMO (Fear of Missing Out).The relation between FoMO and social comparison lies in the fact that FoMO is often triggered by observing other's experience, accomplishments or lifestyles on social media or in real life. People experiencing FoMO may feel insufficient or left out when they perceive that others are having more exciting or fulfilling experiences (Wang et al.,2023) A research investigated the dark side of upward social comparison for social media users. The data was collected through online questionnaire method and a total of 556 social networking site users were involved in it. The results revealed that social comparison increased individuals' digital hoarding behaviours and that fear of missing out (FoMO) mediated the effect of social comparison. This effect of social comparison can lead to cycle of constant comparison and anxiety as individuals strive to keep up with the perceived “ideal” lives of others, which they often see through curated

and exaggerated social media posts. British psychologists (Przybylski et.al,2013) elaborated and defined it as “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent”. It was not until 1996 that the term fear of missing out was coined by marketing strategist Dr. Dan Harman. FoMO can take place due to various factors but few of them are loss aversions, regret, too much choices and lower mood. People who fear missing out to a greater extent were more vulnerable to mood disturbances, social media addiction, fatigue, stress, decreased sleep, and poor psychological well-being.

FoMO predicted heightened negative affect over the week. FoMO was found to mediate the effects of psychological deficiencies in social relatedness and autonomy on social media use. FoMO also mediated the effects of boredom proneness and depression and anxiety. A study conducted by Alabri (2022) examined the mechanism that link socially driven factors and the need to belong with social media. Survey was completed by a self-reported questionnaire of 490 college students. As a result the need to belong emerged as the best predictor of FoMO. A study was conducted by Judithya et.al (2019) aimed to investigate the impact of fear of missing out on psychological well being particularly among social media users in adulthood. The study was conducted through an online questionnaire survey of 400 people obtained through random sampling. The results showed that people who suffer from FoMO tend to feel stressed and anxious when they are unable to connect to social media, and also the variable FoMO has a negative impact on the variable psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being is a core feature of mental health, and may be defined as including eudemonic (meaning, fulfilment) and hedonic (pleasure, enjoyment) happiness as well as resilience (coping, emotion regulation, healthy problem solving)(Gross et al.,1995). The importance of mental health has been increasingly emphasized in recent decades as understanding grow and public awareness. Mental health is now understood to involve both the absence of mental illness and the presence of psychological well-being. (Tang et al.,2019) Psychological well-being is one thing that everyone covets. Ryff (1995) described psychological well-being as a person's ability to recognize and develop themselves in accordance with their potential. Ryff (1989) added, a person can be said to have psychological well-being when that person can function positively psychologically. Furthermore, (Ryff et al.,2008) argued that individuals with high psychological well-being will be more productive and have better mental and physical health than individuals whose psychological well-being is low.

Ryff introduced a model of psychological well-being whose principles are associated with greater personal well-being and greater life satisfaction. It affects physical health in terms of lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, better sleep patterns or lower heart risk for example. The Physical well-being model has 6 dimensions namely:

- Self-acceptance
- Environmental mastery
- Autonomy
- Personal growth
- Positive social relations
- Life purpose

Ryff also explained the terms positive and negative emotions in his model of Psychological well-being. Huppert (2009) asserts that psychological well-being is associated with creative thinking and flexible, good health and prosocial behaviour. In this context other scholars have also looked into these variables, including Farahat Ali et al., (2020) who examined the effect of fear of missing out on the psychological well-being of young adults. Data was collected from a sample of 400 university students. Results indicated that there exists a direct positive relationship between FoMO and psychological well-being. Moreover indirect links show that there exists a mediation as well which is social comparison. Several variables have also been studied in this context by other researcher including Fauzia et.al (2023) studied social media induced fear of missing out and social media fatigue. It used keywords fear of missing out, social comparison, narcissism, social media fatigue and time cost. The data was collected through a cross sectional survey from 305 adult Social media platform users in the United States. As per the result FOMO is stimulated by time cost and anxiety and also only social comparison can positively influence fatigue.

Burnell et al.,(2019) examined the relationship among social networking sites, online social comparison, fear of missing out and well-being. A sample of 717 college students was taken. The results suggested that social comparison and FoMO play a role in the links between depressive symptoms, passive social networking sites and self-perceptions and that FoMO could result from online social comparisons. In conclusion various studies on FoMO, social comparison and Psychological well-being show the nuanced interaction of all the three variables. Several studies have investigated this complex network and produced different results. Some studies emphasize the strong influence of these factors, while others emphasize the complex relationship that exist.

METHODOLOGY

AIM

The aim of the research is to investigate the impact of social comparison and FoMO on Psychological Well-Being among University Students.

OBJECTIVE

- To assess the extent to which FoMO influences the Psychological Well-Being of University Students.
- To determine the impact of Social comparison on Psychological Well-Being of University Students.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀₁: There is no significant impact of FOMO on psychological well-being of university students.

H₀₂: There is no significant impact of Social Comparison on Psychological Well-Being of university students.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Present research employs exploratory and correlational research design.

SAMPLE

The sample of the present study consisted of University students pursuing bachelors or undergraduate courses from various universities of Delhi NCR. A number of 100 students(N=100) participated in this study and the data was gathered using Random sampling technique. The sample size of the study was calculated based on z-value of normal distribution curve.

INCLUSION CRETERIA

- Undergraduate students from private university of Delhi NCR.
- Students aged between 18-23 years of age.
- Students from all courses.

EXCLUSION CRETERIA

- Student aged over 23 years.
- Student pursuing diploma/ masters/doctorate.
- Student studying outside Delhi NCR.

TOOLS

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

The fear of missing out scale is a 10 item unidimensional scale set on 5 point Likert type responses ranging from 1(not at all true for me) to 5(extremely true for me) and it measures the degree to which one fears missing out on social events, in particular involving their friends and often using social media to stay connected. This scale has a reliability with Cronbach alphas of 0.87 and 0.90 and has high validity.

Social Comparison Scale (Allan et.al,1995)

This scale is used to measure self perceptions of social rank and relative social standing. This scale uses a semantic differential method and consists of 11 bipolar constructs. Participants were asked to compare themselves broadly with others and rate themselves on a ten point scale. This scale has good reliability with Cronbach alphas of .91 and .90 with student population also the validity of the scale is high.

Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff,1989)

The Ryff psychological well-being scale is a structured self report instrument of psychological well-being, developed by Ryff. The scale incorporates six subscales or dimensions, describing different characteristics of what it means to live well, in terms of “self actualization, full functioning and purposeful engagement.” Items are rated on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. The reliability of this scale ranges from 0.71 to 0.88 and also has high validity.

PROCEDURE

The researcher contacted the people who qualified to take part in the study using basic random selection. To make sure the individuals were willing to participate in the study, written informed consent was obtained from them. The study was explained to the participants, and all of their questions were satisfactorily answered. Additionally, they had to fill out sociodemographic information. Participants will be made aware that the information gathered will be kept private and used exclusively for research.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The acquired findings were analysed using a computer software application SPSS. The analysis was carried out in two phases. The descriptives of the data collected were calculated using mean and standard deviation of the sample. The inferential statistics used in the current study is multiple regression and correlation.

RESULT

The present study focuses on the toll that FoMO and Social comparison take on the Psychological well being of university students. The study also determines the extent to which FoMO and Social Comparison affect the Psychological Well-being.

Variable	Mean	SD	Psychological Well -Being	FoMO	Social Comparison
Psychological Well-Being	77.1400	9.43882	1.000	-0.60	-0.13
FoMO	24.8000	5.63359		1.000	0.99
Social Comparison	70.4300	13.84857			1.000

TABLE 1: Shows the overall frequency mean, standard deviation and values of variables

The Table no.1 shows the mean and standard deviation for all variables. It shows the regression coefficient for FoMO. The coefficient is -0.060 , which suggests that there is a negative relationship between FoMO and psychological well-being. In other words, as FoMO scores increment, psychological well-being scores diminish. The table shows the regression coefficient for Social Comparison. The coefficient is -0.013 , which implies that there is a powerless negative relationship between Social Comparison and psychological well-being. It is important to note that the p-value of the FoMO coefficient is not shown in the table. The p-value

is a measure of statistical significance that indicates whether the observed association between her FoMO and psychological well-being is due to chance or a real effect. Without a p-value, we cannot say with certainty whether this relationship is statistically significant.

Overall, the results of the linear regression study suggest a negative relationship between FoMO and psychological well-being. However, without knowing the p-value of the FoMO coefficient, we cannot say with certainty whether this relationship is statistically significant. The overall mean for psychological well-being is 77.14, with a standard deviation of 9.44. The mean of FoMO (fear of missing out) is 24.80 and the standard deviation is 5.63. The mean for social comparison is 70.43 and the standard deviation is 13.85. There is a significant positive correlation between FoMO and social comparison ($r = 0.99$, $p < 0.001$). This means that people who score high on FoMO also tend to score high on social comparison.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.061 ^a	-.017	9.51796

TABLE 2: Model summary

In table no 2. the adjusted R-squared value is -0.017 which means that the model does not account for the variance in the data. In other words, this model does little more than predict the mean of the dependent variable. The standard error of the estimate is 9.51796. This is a measure of the deviation between the model's predicted value and the actual value. The model explains 61% of the variance in social comparison. The standard error of the estimate is 9.52.

Model	df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	2	.180	.835 ^b
Residual	97		
Total	99		

Table3: Analysis Of Variance

The results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the regression model that looks at how social comparison and FoMO affect university students' psychological health are shown in Table 3. With two predictors (social comparison and FoMO), the model has an F-value of 0.180 and a significance level (Sig.) of 0.835. Due to the high p-value, the regression model is not statistically significant, indicating that the combined effects of social comparison and FoMO on the psychological well-being of the study participants are not statistically significant. The sample size less the number of predictors and the intercept is represented by the residual degrees of freedom, which are 97. This implies that psychological well-being may be more significantly influenced by variables not included by this model.

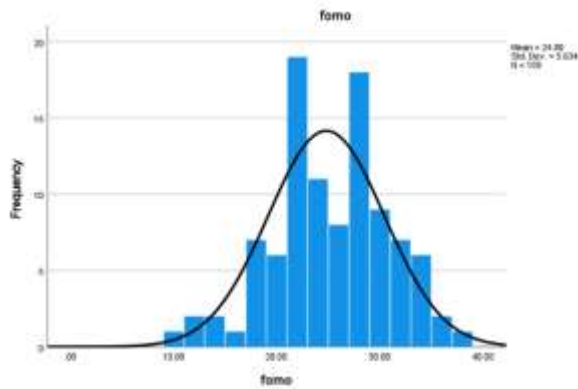


Figure 1: FoMO

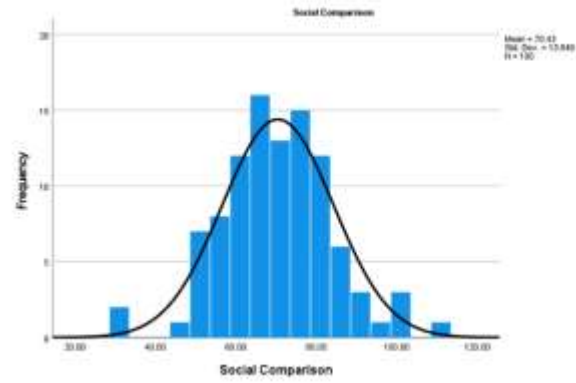


Figure 2: Social Comparison

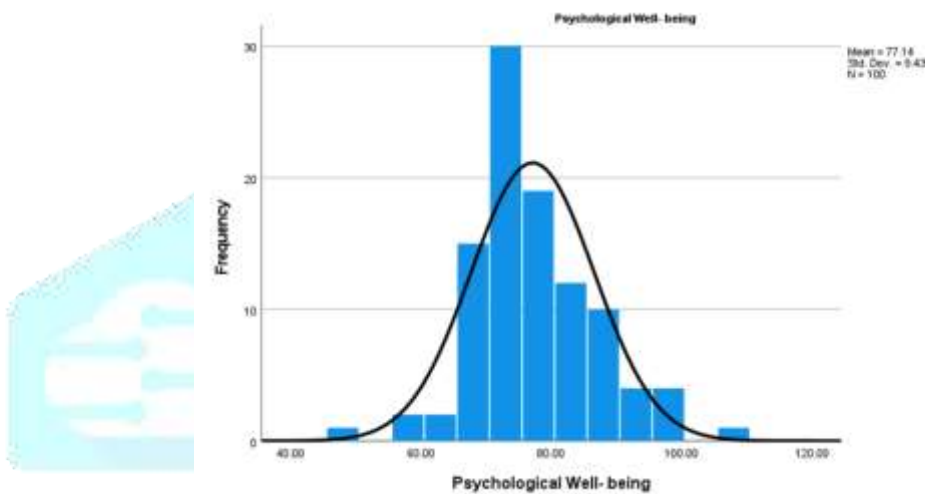


Figure 3: Psychological Well- being

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The key findings and implications of the study are as follows:-

1.Negative Affect of FoMO and Social Comparison: The investigation precisely highlights the key finding that both FoMO and social comparison have a negative affect on mental well-being. It adjusts with existing investigate appearing how centring on others' accomplishments and fearing missed opportunities can lead to stress, uneasiness, low self-esteem, and diminished life fulfilment.

2.Interconnecting of FoMO and Social Comparison: The research accurately point out that FoMO and social comparison are interconnected which means that higher FoMO leads to expanded social comparison, encourage increasing negative impacts on well-being.

The finding recommends that mediations focusing on both angles may be more viable.

3.Effect on Individual Advancement: The investigation moreover touches upon the affect of these components on individual improvement. Fixating on comparisons can prevent setting individual objectives and centring on person development, driving to a cycle of stagnation and despondency. It emphasizes the significance of advancing self-awareness and setting boundaries to break this cycle.

4.Social and Social Impacts: The examination recognizes the potential part of person variations and social impacts in forming these connections. Typically pivotal, as the affect of FoMO and social comparison can change depending on identity characteristics, social standards, and social bolster frameworks.

LIMITATIONS

In the present study correlation was done so it cannot set up causation between FoMO, social comparison, and mental well-being. The sample was not found representative of the common populace, because it was constrained to college understudies. It depended on self-reported measures, which can be subject to predisposition. The study did not control for other potential components that may impact mental well-being, such as identity characteristics or life occasions. The think about did not look at the long-term impacts of FoMO and social comparison on mental well-being. The analysis may not account for other components impacting well-being, such as identity characteristics, social back, or financial status. Self-reported measures of FoMO and social comparison may be one-sided or wrong. Cross-sectional plan: The study cannot build up causality between factors, as it were relationship. The test might not be agent of the broader population. Social standards and values with respect to social comparison and victory might not be tended to.

CONCLUSION

The analysis offers a comprehensive viewpoint on the complex relationship between FoMO, social comparison and psychological wellbeing. According to the data received we arrived at a conclusion that the results, clarifying the intricate relationship between social comparison, psychological well-being, and fear of missing out on opportunities, in the context of current literature and theoretical frameworks. In addition to taking into account the significance of individual variations and cultural influences, it investigates potential explanatory mechanisms, including social media usage patterns, interpersonal connections, and identity formation processes. After applying regression on the variables, the results obtained explains that FoMO and social comparison have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing of an individual. It means an individual Comparing oneself to others whether in terms of accomplishments, looks, or way of life can make one feel more stressed and anxious.

These emotions can be made worse by the dread of missing out on opportunities or experiences, which puts pressure on oneself to always be on pace with peers and feel urgent. Social comparison often entails assessing one's own value in relation to another' alleged accomplishments or characteristics. It can exacerbate poor self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy, particularly in situations when people believe they are falling short of their peers. It may result in low confidence in one's own talents and a negative self-image.

In general, one's overall well-being and life satisfaction can be greatly impacted by the combined effects of social comparison and FoMO. One's sense of contentment and happiness might be diminished by continuously concentrating on what other people have or are doing, rather than taking the time to appreciate and enjoy one's own life and achievements.

Results also suggest that if FoMO increases the person's level of social comparison also increases but overall, the psychological wellbeing of an individual decreases. Personal development can also be hindered by comparison with others. People may get fascinated with competing with others instead of concentrating on their own objectives and advancement, which can create a vicious cycle of unhappiness and stagnation. In general, excessive engagement in social comparison and FoMO especially in the context of social media and digital connectivity can have negative consequences on psychological well-being, even if

these behaviours are normal parts of human activity. To lessen the detrimental effects of these occurrences, people must develop healthy boundaries, self-awareness, and self-compassion practices. Positive mental health outcomes and resistance against the demands of comparison and FoMO can also be fostered by creating a culture of authenticity and support in social circles and educational institutions.

REFERENCES

1. Abbas, J., Aman, J., Nurunnabi, M., & Bano, S. (2019). The Impact of Social Media on Learning Behavior for Sustainable Education: Evidence of Students from Selected Universities in Pakistan. *Sustainability*, 11(6), 1683. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061683>
2. Alabri, A. (2022). Fear of missing out (FOMO): the effects of the need to belong, perceived centrality, and fear of social exclusion. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2022, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4824256>
3. Anto, A., Asif, R. O., Basu, A., Kanapathipillai, D., Salam, H., Selim, R., Zaman, J., & Eisingerich, A. B. (2023). Exploring the impact of social media on anxiety among university students in the United Kingdom: Qualitative study. *JMIR Formative Research*, 7, e43037. <https://doi.org/10.2196/43037>
4. Bajwa, R. S., Abdullah, H., Zaremohzzabieh, Z., Jaafar, W. M. W., & Samah, A. A. (2023). Smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior among university students: A moderated mediation model by fear of missing out, social comparison, and loneliness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1072551>
5. Bekalu, M. A., McCloud, R. F., & Viswanath, K. (2019). Association of Social Media use with Social Well-Being, Positive Mental Health, and Self-Rated Health: disentangling routine use from emotional connection to use. *Health Education & Behavior*, 46(2_suppl), 69S-80S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198119863768>
6. Burnell, K., George, M. J., Vollet, J. W., Ehrenreich, S. E., & Underwood, M. K. (2019). Passive social networking site use and well-being: The mediating roles of social comparison and the fear of missing out. *Cyberpsychology*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.5817/cp2019-3-5>
7. Celestine, N., PhD. (2023, October 9). The Ryff Scales of Psychological Wellbeing: Your How-To Guide. *PositivePsychology.com*. <https://positivepsychology.com/ryff-scale-psychological-wellbeing/>
8. Elhai, J. D., Yang, H., Rozgonjuk, D., & Montag, C. (2020). Using machine learning to model problematic smartphone use severity: The significant role of fear of missing out. *Addictive Behaviors*, 103, 106261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2019.106261>
9. Hai-Xia, W., Miao, P., Jia, H., & Lai, K. (2023). The dark side of upward social comparison for social media users: an investigation of fear of missing out and digital hoarding behavior. *Social Media + Society*, 9(1), 205630512211504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305122115042>
10. Jabeen, F., Tandon, A., Sithipolvanichgul, J., Srivastava, S., & Dhir, A. (2023). Social media-induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media fatigue: The role of narcissism, comparison and disclosure. *Journal of Business Research*, 159, 113693. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113693>

10. Laurence, E. (2023, September 20). The Psychology Behind The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Forbes Health. <https://www.forbes.com/health/mind/the-psychology-behind-fomo/>
11. Marengo, D., Montag, C., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Settanni, M. (2021). Examining the links between active Facebook use, received likes, self-esteem and happiness: A study using objective social media data. *Telematics and Informatics*, 58, 101523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101523>
12. O'Day, E., & Heimberg, R. G. (2021). Social media use, social anxiety, and loneliness: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 3, 100070. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100070>

