International Journal of Social Science Research and Review

http://ijssrr.com
editor@ijssrr.com
Volume 8, Issue 8
August, 2025
Pages: 100-113

The Psychology of Missing Out: Age-Wise Patterns of FOMO and Anxiety

Vivaan Mansukhani

Sanskriti School, India

E-mail: vivaan.mansukh@gmail.com

http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i8.2785

Abstract

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Anxiety have become defining psychological experiences in the age of social media, where people constantly compare their lives online. This study explores the occurrence of FOMO across age groups, along with its correlation with anxiety and social media usage. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed using an online survey distributed via Google Forms. The survey gathered quantitative data on FOMO and Anxiety using official scales, alongside information on social media tendencies of 86 participants aged from under 18 to 60 years. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and correlation analysis, by age groups. These show that FOMO is highest among participants under 18 and generally decreases with age. Anxiety scores follow a similar trend. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.53$, $p < .001$) was observed between FOMO and Anxiety. Social media usage significantly varied with younger participants preferring Instagram and Snapchat, while Facebook usage increased with age. LinkedIn was used most by 18-30 year olds, implying career-related priorities. This paper showcases age as a significant factor influencing both FOMO and anxiety. The results illustrate the need for age-targeted mental programmes, especially for adolescents. Future research with a more diverse and larger sample size could enhance the understanding of FOMO and Anxiety's developmental and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); Anxiety; Age; Social Media*

1. Introduction

1.1. General Background

FOMO, or the Fear of Missing Out, is characterised as feeling anxious when missing out on a rewarding experience that others in your peer group are undertaking (Przybylski et al., 2013). It has grown to be a prevalent psychological event of our day. This increase in FOMO can be linked to an increase in digital connectivity due to the spread of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook,

YouTube, and the like. These platforms are filled with carefully planned peeks into people's lives, which create feelings of inadequacy, exclusion, and dissatisfaction. (Dhir et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2021). However, the effects of FOMO and how much they are felt are different amongst people based on factors like age groups, developmental stages, what expectations are set for them, and their priorities. Anxiety is considered to be a state of heightened nervousness, worry, or unease, commonly arising in anticipation of perceived danger or uncertainty (Craske et al., 2009). It is also another psychological phenomenon that is intertwined with our digital habits and FOMO. Whilst it is a natural emotion to have, excessive anxiety can interfere with our day-to-day lives and even affect our mental health. Social media affects both FOMO and Anxiety in similar ways, amplifying feelings of insecurity and self-doubt thanks to the constant updates on people's lives it provides (Dhir et al., 2018; Elhai et al., 2016).

FOMO appears differently among people of different age groups based on factors like varying life stages and priorities. Social media provides significant inputs to people's lives in the form of achievements of peers, events they are missing out on, and milestones that 'should' be achieved. For teenagers who are particularly likely to compare themselves and feel the need for approval from their peers, the continuous comparison through these apps can cause feelings of exclusion and inadequacy (Van Der Wal et al., 2024). For middle-aged adults, they experience FOMO based on their professional and personal lives. By seeing their peers' advancements in career, milestones in family, or financial successes, they feel that they are falling behind. This age group is under pressure to 'have it all' from society, trying to balance professional accomplishments with family and personal goals (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). In older people, FOMO is particularly felt by those who are retired or have fewer social interactions. They feel it when they see others participating in events, leisure, or travel activities. Due to their lack of opportunities, FOMO can create feelings of isolation and a longing for these experiences. Decrease in physical abilities and social networks due to their age can compound these feelings. Similar to FOMO, Anxiety appears differently across different life stages (Brenes, 2006). In teenagers and young adults, anxiety is often related to identity development, peer acceptance, and academic or career uncertainty. For middle-aged adults, it may be due to financial responsibilities, career progression, or family dynamics. For older adults, anxiety can appear due to health-related concerns, lack of social activities, or an excess of free time. Research suggests that emotional regulation develops with age, leading to lower anxiety levels among older populations (Brenes, 2006). However, it depends on the situational factors of the person, such as social isolation or unmet expectations, which can still trigger episodes of anxiety in any age group, emphasising the need for age-sensitive mental health strategies.

The psychological effect of FOMO has been well documented with studies linking it to increased stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with life (Elhai et al., 2016; Milyavskaya et al., 2018). Individuals experiencing FOMO may feel excluded or inadequate, particularly when comparing their lives to the idealised snapshots present online. Over time, these feelings can lead to chronic stress, low self-esteem, and even depression (Elhai et al. 2016). Emotionally, FOMO undermines contentment and self-acceptance. It creates a continuous cycle of comparison and dissatisfaction, preventing individuals from fully engaging with their present lives (Milyavskaya et al. 2018). The effects of this emotional agitation can also spill over into physical health, appearing as disrupted sleep patterns, fatigue, and symptoms of restlessness (Scott et al., 2020). Younger individuals who are more active on social media are particularly vulnerable to these effects as they are immensely affected by their perceived social standing and peer validation (Beyens et al., 2016). Anxiety, which FOMO intensifies, has its own set of psychological effects (Craske et al. 2009). Chronic anxiety can impair attention, memory, and decision-making. It can also increase susceptibility to mental health disorders such as depression and social withdrawal. Studies have shown that persistent anxiety can affect emotional regulation and contribute to irritability, feelings of helplessness, and avoidance behaviours (Cisler et al., 2009). It can also have long-term impacts on personal and academic lives, particularly in adolescents and young adults who are at formative stages in life. When paired with digital stimulation like constant alerts, comparisons, and fear of exclusion, anxiety can create a loop that affects both mental and physical health (Vannucci et al., 2016). These overlapping

effects highlight FOMO and Anxiety being interconnected. Therefore, this paper looks into different parts of FOMO and Anxiety across different ages, highlighting triggers and potential consequences.

1.2. Literature Review

There have been multiple studies in the past to evaluate the intricacies of FOMO and Anxiety, revealing triggers and effects as well as looking at demographic variations. Social media usage can be identified as a contributing factor to both FOMO and Anxiety, which causes psychological distress. Here are some of these studies that show how they stem from unmet psychological needs to fit in.

A study conducted by Rozgonjuk et al. (2020) sought to examine the relationships between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), age, gender, and personality traits. Using an online survey as the method from 3,370 German respondents, the study assessed the data using correlation analysis. They concluded that younger individuals experience higher FoMO, with Neuroticism positively correlating with FoMO, while Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were negatively associated. No gender differences were found. The findings show the significance of examining personality-outcome associations at different levels. Another research done by Dou et al. (2021) sought to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among Chinese college students. Using a survey from 806 respondents, the study looked at the information through mediation and moderation analysis. They concluded that perceived social support negatively correlates with FoMO, with basic psychological needs partially mediating this relationship. Additionally, perceived stress moderates the mediating role of basic psychological needs. The results provide theoretical and real-world effects for preventing FoMO and mitigating its negative psychological effects. Ibrahim et al. (2022), in their research, aimed to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), depression, and anxiety among undergraduate Health Sciences students in a public university in Selangor. Using a cross-sectional survey from 281 respondents, the research examined information through correlation analysis. It was concluded that while most participants had low FoMO and normal depression and anxiety levels, FoMO positively correlated with psychological distress. Significant gender differences in FoMO prevalence were observed. The results offer insight into FoMO's dual role in fulfilling social needs and contributing to mental health challenges.

Specifically, for India, a study conducted by Rajanna and Sathyanath (2021) aimed to examine the association between problematic internet use and psychological distress, specifically anxiety, depression, and stress, among adolescents in an urban area of South India. Using a cross-sectional survey of school students aged 13–18 and analyzing data through the DASS-21 scale, the study assessed levels of emotional distress in relation to digital behavior. The findings showed that almost 50% of the participants reported significant anxiety symptoms, and problematic internet use was a predictor of this. The study illustrates the growing mental health burden linked to excessive online activity in younger age groups and highlights the need for digital hygiene education in adolescent populations. Moreover, with respect to the global economic shock, a study conducted by Chawla et al. (2021) aimed to review the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents in India. Conducting a systematic review of empirical studies published during the pandemic, the researchers evaluated sources of anxiety, emotional distress, and behavioral issues in young individuals. The findings showed that social isolation, disrupted routines, academic uncertainty, and increased screen time had a significant influence, leading to elevated anxiety levels. The analysis highlights how environmental stressors and crisis-induced lifestyle changes can worsen mental health issues in developmentally vulnerable populations.

Lastly, in the same realm, Yadav and Khullar (2024) aimed to look into the relationship between social media use, anxiety, and counseling attitudes among adolescents in Delhi. Using standardized psychological scales in a sample of 120 students aged 16–20, the study assessed anxiety prevalence and its association with digital behaviors. The findings showed that 37.5% of participants reported moderate

to high levels of anxiety, with a significant link to social media use, peer validation, and FOMO. The study also showed a reluctance to seek professional help, especially among female participants, highlighting the need for greater awareness and accessibility of mental health resources among Indian youth.

1.3. Literature Gap and Rationale

The majority of research on FOMO focuses on young adults, particularly college students, and how social media use, psychological suffering, and personality factors are related to it. Research on how FOMO manifests in different age groups, such as middle-aged and older adults, is lacking, nevertheless. Furthermore, there hasn't been enough research done on how different cultures and geographical areas experience FOMO. Understanding the age-related differences in FOMO can help create better treatments to deal with its psychological effects. This study is important because it examines the effects of FOMO across a variety of age groups, extending our understanding beyond young adults. Although there is existing literature that tells about FOMO's general characteristics, it is largely focused on young adults, creating a gap in information about older groups. The interaction between FOMO and anxiety across different age groups is also unexplored. By examining FOMO's prevalence, triggers, and impacts across different age groups, this study aims to understand the development patterns that shape FOMO experiences as well as answer the question:

"What is the relationship between FOMO and anxiety across different age groups?"

By addressing this, the research contributes to a better grasp of FOMO's role in modern society and its implications for mental health and social behavior. The findings can help develop age-suitable methods for reducing anxiety associated with FOMO and improving mental health at various phases of life.

2.Methodology

2.1. Research Aim and Objectives

The study uses a research design based on descriptive and correlational analysis to look at the nature of FOMO and Anxiety across different age groups and examine how social media usage can affect these patterns. The objectives are as follows:

- To analyze the difference in levels of FOMO among individuals across different age groups
- To evaluate the difference in Anxiety level among individuals across different age groups
- To explore the relationship between FOMO and Anxiety
- To find out the different preferences for social media usage

2.2. Research Hypothesis

This study assumes that age significantly influences both the levels of FOMO and Anxiety. To statistically test the same, the following hypotheses were assumed.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in FOMO between the given age groups.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in Anxiety between the given age groups.

Hypothesis 3: There is no correlation between FOMO and Anxiety.

In addition to this, the study proposes that social media patterns will notably vary across the different age groups, with the younger participants being more likely to engage with platforms known to heighten feelings of social comparison and FOMO. These patterns would contribute to the observed psychological outcomes, supporting the idea that social media behavior, age, and emotional well-being are also interconnected.

2.3. Data Collection Tool and Process

Data was collected through an online survey hosted on Google Forms. The survey included quantitative questions consisting of demographic questions, FOMO, and anxiety scales. The FOMO scale consisted of 8 statements and was taken from Holte (2023) and graded based on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), and the Anxiety scale was the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7).

2.4. Participants and Sampling

Convenience and targeted sampling were done in order to obtain data. The sample was aged between less than 18 to 60 years and was targeted to ensure representation across multiple age groups. The sample size aimed for 86 participants, divided among age brackets: Under 18, 18-30, 31-45, and 45-60. Among the sample, the number of people in each age bracket is roughly equal, with a slightly higher number of female respondents at 56%. Most are either single (54%) or married (42%). Most of the sample has completed a Master's Degree (31.4%), followed by Below or Equivalent to High school (30.2%), Bachelor's Degree(26.7%), Higher than Master's(7%), and Diploma (4.7%). The employment statuses are Student (36.0%), Salaried Employee, (31.4%), Professional (11.6%), Business Owner (10.5%), Not Employed (8.1%), Retired (2.3%) with 58% earning upto 20 Lakhs INR and higher and 42% not earning which lines up with the number of students, not employed and retired.

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

The descriptive statistical analysis was first conducted on the data to get the mean and standard deviation for the various scores of FOMO, Anxiety, and social media usage across the different age groups. This showed the general trends in responses. After which, ANOVA tests were conducted on the FOMO and Anxiety scores to find the significance of differences among the age groups. This was followed by Bonferroni tests to find the pairwise differences. The correlation between FOMO and Anxiety was found using Pearson's correlation analysis. ANOVA, or Analysis of Variance, is "a statistical method used to compare the means of three or more groups by analyzing variance between and within the groups" (Laerd Statistics, 2018). It was done to determine whether levels of FOMO and anxiety differ significantly across age groups. The Bonferroni test is "a multiple-comparison adjustment used when several dependent or independent statistical tests are being performed simultaneously on a single data set" (Armstrong, 2014). Here, it was applied after the ANOVA result to determine which specific age groups differ from one another. Pearson's correlation coefficient is "a measure of the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables" (Schober et al., 2018). In this study, correlation analysis was used to find out whether higher levels of FOMO are associated with increased anxiety.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

This study made sure to ensure certain principles, including anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were told exactly how their data would be used. No personally identifiable information, such as name or email, was collected, ensuring anonymity. Additionally, all responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. The findings were presented in an aggregated form to protect individual participant privacy.

3.Results and discussion

3.1. FOMO by Age Groups

Table 1.Descriptive Statistics of FOMO by Age Groups

	Age Group	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
FOMO	Less than 18 years	24	29.92	7.06	8	40
	18-30 years	22	20.86	5.78	10	30
	31-45 years	20	20.75	6.67	8	33
	46-60 years	20	18.9	4.23	9	27

Table 2. ANOVA results for FOMO by Age Groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Effect Size η2	Cohens f2
Age Group	1685.28	3	561.76	15.19	<.001***	0.36	0.56
Residual	3031.97	82	36.98				
Total	4717.26	85					

**** represents p-value<0.01, df is the degree of freedom*

Table 3.Bonferroni test for FOMO by Age Groups

	Mean diff.	Std. Error	t	p
Less than 18 years - 18-30 years	9.05	1.79	5.04	<.001***
Less than 18 years - 46-60 years	11.02	1.84	5.98	<.001***
Less than 18 years - 31-45 years	9.17	1.84	4.98	<.001***
18-30 years - 46-60 years	1.96	1.88	1.05	1
18-30 years - 31-45 years	0.11	1.88	0.06	1
46-60 years - 31-45 years	-1.85	1.92	-0.96	1

**** represents p-value<0.01*

Table 1, representing the descriptive statistics of FOMO, shows that FOMO has the highest prevalence in the less than 18-year category, with a mean score of almost 30 out of a maximum of 40. The average FOMO score decreases with each subsequent age group, from highest in the under 18 category at (29.92), followed by those between 18–30 years (20.86), 31–45 years (20.75), and 46–60 years(18.9). To check if there are significant differences in FOMO ratings between age groups, ANOVA (Table 2) was performed. The p-value of <.001 is smaller than the level of 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the different age groups. In other words, age has a significant impact on FOMO. According to Cohen's η2, being greater than 0.35 implies a strong effect of age on FOMO. From Table 3, the Bonferroni test for FOMO suggests that individuals under the age of 18 exhibited significantly higher FOMO scores compared to all other age groups. Specifically, the differences between the under-18 group and the 18–30, 31–45, and 46–60 age groups were all statistically significant (p <.001), with mean differences of 9.05, 9.17, and 11.02, respectively. These findings suggest that adolescents experience notably higher levels of FOMO. However, there were no significant differences in FOMO scores among the adult age groups (18–30, 31–45, and 46–60 years), indicating that FOMO tends to stabilize or diminish after adolescence.

3.2. Anxiety by Age Groups

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Anxiety by Age Groups

	Age Group	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Anxiety	Less than 18 years	24	10.79	5.48	0	21
	18-30 years	22	7.5	5.54	0	20
	31-45 years	20	6.4	4.25	0	17
	46-60 years	20	4.6	3.53	0	14

Table 5.ANOVA results for Anxiety by Age Groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Effect Size η2	Cohens f2
What is your age?	452.43	3	150.81	6.46	0.001***	0.19	0.24
Residual	1913.06	82	23.33				
Total	2365.49	85					

**** represents p-value<0.01, df is the degree of freedom*

Table 6.Bonferroni test for Anxiety by Age Groups

	Mean diff.	Std. Error	t	p
Less than 18 years - 18-30 years	3.29	1.43	2.31	0.141
Less than 18 years - 46-60 years	6.19	1.46	4.23	<.001***
Less than 18 years - 31-45 years	4.39	1.46	3	0.021
18-30 years - 46-60 years	2.9	1.49	1.94	0.332
18-30 years - 31-45 years	1.1	1.49	0.74	1
46-60 years - 31-45 years	-1.8	1.53	-1.18	1

*** *represents p-value<0.01*

Table 4, representing the descriptive statistics of Anxiety, similarly shows how anxiety has the highest prevalence in the less than 18-year category, with a mean score of 10.79 out of a maximum of 21. The average anxiety score decreases with each subsequent age group, starting with the highest in the under 18 category (10.79), followed by those between 18–30 years (7.5), 31–45 years (6.4), and the lowest among individuals aged 46–60 years (4.6), as seen in the case of FOMO. Another ANOVA was performed to see if there were significant differences in anxiety levels between age groups. The p-value of .001 is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there is a significant difference between the different age groups. This implies that anxiety levels are significantly influenced by age. A similar trend was observed in the Bonferroni analysis for anxiety. The under-18 group reported significantly higher anxiety levels than both the 31–45 and 46–60 age groups, with mean differences of 4.39 (p = .021) and 6.19 (p <.001), respectively. However, the difference between the under-18 and 18–30 groups was not statistically significant (p = .141), suggesting that elevated anxiety may extend into early adulthood. No significant differences in anxiety were found among the adult groups themselves. These results reinforce existing literature indicating that adolescents and young adults are more susceptible to anxiety, often as a result of academic pressure, identity concerns, and social comparison. The combined outcomes of the FOMO and anxiety tests further suggest that both constructs are closely linked to age-related developmental and social factors, with a notable decline as individuals progress into midlife and older adulthood.

3.3. Relationship between FOMO and Anxiety

Table 7. Correlation of FOMO and Anxiety

Correlation		
	r	p
FOMO and Anxiety scale	0.53	<.001***

*** *represents p-value<0.01, r is the correlation value*

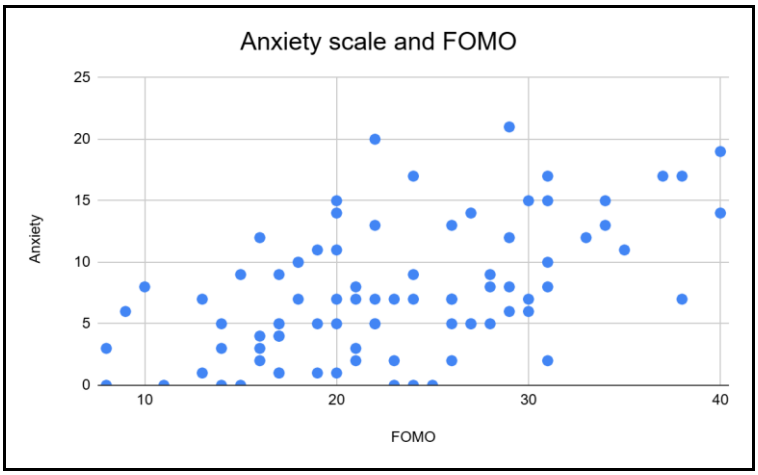

Figure 1.Correlation Scatterplot of FOMO and Anxiety

The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.53 suggests a moderate, positive correlation. This means that, generally, as FOMO increases, Anxiety also tends to increase and vice versa. Here, the p-value of <.001 is less than 0.05, which suggests that the correlation observed in the sample (r = 0.53) is not likely by chance. This implies that there was a statistically significant correlation between FOMO and Anxiety. The scatter chart in Figure 1 supports the correlation results. It can be seen from the figure that there is a positive relationship between FOMO and Anxiety as depicted by the upward slope. However, the flatter slope indicates a moderate correlation between the variables.

3.4. Social Media Use and Age

Table 8. Percentage of social media use among each age group

Age	Instagram	Facebook	Snapchat	Twitter	LinkedIn	Other
Less than 18 years	79.17	8.33	29.17	12.5	16.67	29.17
18-30 years	86.36	4.55	22.73	4.55	40.91	4.55
31-45 years	60	40	5	15	10	15
46-60 years	20	70	0	10	25	30

From the above table, it can be observed that among people, Instagram and Snapchat usage among the age groups of less than 18 and 18-30 years is decreasing with an increase in age. This is likely due to how Instagram and Snapchat serve as interactive platforms, easily garnering attention, as well as limited exposure to these platforms among the age groups of 31-45 and 46-60. For Facebook, an inverse of this occurs, with the least usage among the age groups of less than 18 and 18-30 years, and increasing with age. The reasons for this could be how platforms like Facebook are older and may be regarded as lesser by the younger respondents, whilst it has been and continues to be used by older generations. The usage of Twitter is varied amongst the age groups, with 31-45 year olds using it the most closely followed by less under 18 years old. Additionally, LinkedIn usage paints an interesting picture as it demonstrates how 18-30 year olds place great importance on establishing themselves through a job and therefore have greater usage. Another fact is that usage of this platform increases for the age group of 46-60 years rather than decreasing. Lastly, 'Other' mainly consists of platforms such as YouTube, Discord, WhatsApp, and Reddit. The usage of these will most likely change from person to person.

4. Discussion

The results of the study give evidence that both FOMO and anxiety decrease with age, and that social media usage patterns differ significantly across age groups. These findings are in line with existing theories and studies on age-related psychological development and also highlight some social and behavioral factors that influence FOMO and its consequences.

The descriptive statistics and ANOVA results indicate that FOMO is highest among individuals under 18, with a sharp decline in the 18–30 age group and even lower levels in adults aged 31–60. This goes along with other studies that suggest that younger individuals are more likely to be susceptible to social comparison and peer validation, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood (Przybylski et al., 2013; Milyavskaya et al., 2018). At these stages, individuals are still forming their identities and are highly sensitive to how they are perceived by others, especially on social media platforms where curated content dominates. Another potential explanation for the increase in FOMO scores amongst those in younger age groups could be their increased social media usage. Platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, which are mostly used by these age groups, rely on visuals and immediate gratification paired with sophisticated systems to maintain engagement, according to Table 6. These platforms continuously showcase others' achievements and lifestyles, leading to frequent social comparison and fear of exclusion (Beyens et al., 2016). In comparison to this, middle-aged and older age groups report comparatively lower scores of FOMO. They can be believed to have greater emotional maturity, an established self-identity, and a shift in focus from social approval to personal fulfilment, which could contribute to this. However, the presence of FOMO in older age groups, though lower on average, still emerges under specific circumstances. One such case is of the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults reported missing social gatherings and experiences, which contributed to feelings of exclusion (LeRoy et al., 2023). This shows that FOMO, while less frequent in older adults, is still not absent.

The pattern observed for Anxiety levels closely resembles that of FOMO, with younger age groups reporting the highest levels of anxiety and older adults reporting the lowest. Similar to the reasons for FOMO, this may be due to the emotional volatility, academic and social pressures, along with the identity struggles that are prevalent in the lives of adolescents and young adults. There is literature supporting this finding that suggests that emotional regulation abilities develop with age, reducing susceptibility to anxiety in older adults (Brummer et al., 2013). Additionally, some studies show that FOMO can be a predictor of anxiety, especially among those who are heavily invested in social media (Einstein, 2023). The correlation analysis of FOMO and Anxiety present in this study supports this idea, showing a moderate to strong positive relationship between FOMO and anxiety ($r = 0.53$, $p < .001$), potentially due to the shared influencing factors they have, such as comparison against other people and being excluded from a group activity. This suggests that individuals who experience higher FOMO are more likely to suffer from anxiety as well, possibly due to the common extreme social comparison, fear of exclusion, and reduced self-esteem. FOMO causes people to constantly monitor others' online activities, which can heighten anxiety by reinforcing the feeling that they are being left out. Over time, this mental strain can lower self-esteem and increase emotional sensitivity to perceived rejection, thus contributing to heightened anxiety levels.

The differences in social media usage between the different age groups show why the differences in FOMO and anxiety scores occur. Instagram and Snapchat, which are mostly used by younger individuals, could be causing this. Older adults showed a preference for Facebook and LinkedIn, platforms associated with community engagement and professional networking, and less likely to induce FOMO-driven anxiety. This data lines up with the findings from studies such as Karishma and Bhatt (2025) & Thomas and George (2025) that show college students in India experiencing heightened FOMO and psychological distress based on social media usage. The current study's findings, derived from an

Indian sample, are consistent with this pattern and highlight the cultural relevance of FOMO in emerging economies with rising digital spread.

Conclusion

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged to be a defining psychological phenomenon in today's age, primarily driven by the rise of various social media platforms that constantly showcase others' lives, achievements, and experiences in a curated form. This study sought to examine FOMO not as a universal experience, but as one shaped significantly by age, stage of life, and social context. The main objective of this research was to explore how FOMO occurs across different age groups, specifically under 18, 18–30, 31–45, and 46–60 years, and how it correlates with anxiety levels and social media usage. This was done using an online survey through Google Forms and received participation from 86 individuals, with a roughly equal amount of around 21 in each category. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and correlation analysis were done using standardized scales for FOMO and anxiety. This analysis showed that FOMO is the most prevalent among people below the age of 18, with the mean score decreasing as we move to older age groups. This is in line with the idea of younger individuals being more easily affected by their peer groups due to being unsure about their identities. Anxiety scores followed a similar trend, with younger age groups having higher mean scores. A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.53$, $p < .001$) between FOMO and anxiety further validates the relation between them, with social media acting as both a trigger and amplifier. While younger ages are more vulnerable to this, it can be noticed that there was a major presence of FOMO among the older adults, particularly due to missed social interactions from the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows that although FOMO generally declines with age, it can still vary widely from individual to individual based on feelings of estrangement and their situations. Looking at the usage of social media platforms further highlights generational trends with younger users preferring platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, which are image and interaction-heavy, while older groups lean towards Facebook and other platforms. Although it could be attributed to simply limited exposure to certain platforms, it also reflects each group's developmental priorities from identity building and peer engagement to professional growth and social maintenance.

Limitations and Rationale of the Study

For all its insights, this study is still limited in its scope as well as sample. While a sample of 86 is sufficient to fuel these findings, it is not truly enough to generalize results. All the individuals who participated are also located in India, which could change the results based on location. Cultural and regional acceptance may also affect FOMO and Anxiety in a major way. Additionally, factors such as language, access to technology, and family dynamics could play a role in how these occur. Reliance on self-reported data can also introduce potential biases, such as social desirability or misinterpretation of questions.

Future research could aim to address these limitations by expanding the sample as well as ensuring a wide demographic is represented to understand cultural perspectives. Looking at trends across a period, coupled with understanding how different age groups cope, could also provide additional insights into both FOMO and Anxiety. In conclusion, this research contributes to the body of literature on FOMO and Anxiety by emphasizing its age-specific characteristics and psychological impacts. The evidence from this paper reveals a need for targeted interventions, particularly among youth, to cultivate healthy social media habits and reduce anxiety. This could be done by having digital wellness workshops and encouraging healthier online behavior through public awareness campaigns. Simultaneously, acknowledging and addressing FOMO & Anxiety in older populations during transitional periods such as retirement or global crises can help build more inclusive mental health strategies. Community-building

activities and social support groups can be created to foster relationships between peers and allow chances to meet new people. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of these across life stages can help guide the development of age-based support systems, mental wellness programs, and digital literacy initiatives that promote emotional resilience in an increasingly connected world.

References

Armstrong, R. A. (2014). When to use the Bonferroni correction. *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics*, *34*(5), 502–508. https://doi.org/10.1111/opo.12131.

Beyens, I., Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2016). "I don't want to miss a thing": Adolescents' fear of missing out and its relationship to adolescents' social needs, Facebook use, and Facebook related stress. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *64*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.083.

Brenes, G. A. (2006). Age differences in the presentation of anxiety. *Aging & Mental Health*, *10*(3), 298–302. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860500409898.

Brummer, L., Stopa, L., & Bucks, R. (2013). The influence of age on emotion regulation strategies and psychological distress. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, *42*(6), 668–681. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1352465813000453.

Chawla, N., Tom, A., Sen, M. S., & Sagar, R. (2021). Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Adolescents: A Systematic review. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, *43*(4), 294–299. https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176211021789.

Cisler, J. M., Olatunji, B. O., Feldner, M. T., & Forsyth, J. P. (2009). Emotion Regulation and the Anxiety Disorders: An Integrative review. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, *32*(1), 68–82. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-009-9161-1

Craske, M. G., Rauch, S. L., Ursano, R., Prenoveau, J., Pine, D. S., & Zinbarg, R. E. (2009). What is an anxiety disorder? *Depression and Anxiety*, *26*(12), 1066–1085. https://doi.org/10.1002/da.20633.

Dhir, A., Yossatorn, Y., Kaur, P., & Chen, S. (2018). Online social media fatigue and psychological wellbeing—A study of compulsive use, fear of missing out, fatigue, anxiety and depression. *International Journal of Information Management*, *40*, 141–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.01.012.

Dou, F., Li, Q., Li, X., Li, Q., & Wang, M. (2021). Impact of perceived social support on fear of missing out (FoMO): A moderated mediation model. *Current Psychology*, *42*(1), 63–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01404-4.

Einstein, D. A., Dabb, C., & Fraser, M. (2023). FoMO, but not self-compassion, moderates the link between social media use and anxiety in adolescence. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *75*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2023.2217961.

Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Dvorak, R. D., & Hall, B. J. (2016). Fear of missing out, need for touch, anxiety and depression are related to problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 509–516. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.079.

Holte, A. J. (2023). The State Fear of Missing Out Inventory: Development and validation. *Telematics and Informatics Reports*, *10*, 100055. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teler.2023.100055.

Ibrahim, S. a. S., Dahlan, A., Pauzi, N. N. W. M., & Vetrayan, J. (2022). Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and its relation with Depression and Anxiety among University Students. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, *7*(20), 233–238. https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7i20.3358.

Karishma, & Bhatt, S. (2025). Exploring the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Among College Students » The International Journal of Indian Psychology. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.25215/1302.010.

LeRoy, A. S., Lai, V. D., Tsay-Jones, A., & Fagundes, C. P. (2023). Fear of missing out and depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *17*(10). https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12828.

Laerd Statistics. (n.d.). *One-way ANOVA-An Introduction to when you should run this test and the test hypothesis* . https://statistics.laerd.com/statistical-guides/one-way-anova-statistical-guide.php.

Milyavskaya, M., Saffran, M., Hope, N., & Koestner, R. (2018). Fear of missing out: prevalence, dynamics, and consequences of experiencing FOMO. *Motivation and Emotion*, *42*(5), 725–737. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9683-5.

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.

Rajanna, K., & Sathyanath, S. M. (2021). Problematic internet use, depression, stress and anxiety among adolescents in an urban area in South India: a cross sectional study. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, *8*(7), 3385. https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20212592.

Rozgonjuk, D., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Montag, C. (2020). 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. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110546.

Schober, P., Boer, C., & Schwarte, L. A. (2018). Correlation Coefficients: appropriate use and interpretation. *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, *126*(5), 1763–1768. https://doi.org/10.1213/ane.0000000000002864.

Scott, H., Biello, S. M., & Woods, H. C. (2019). Social media use and adolescent sleep patterns: cross-sectional findings from the UK millennium cohort study. *BMJ Open*, *9*(9), e031161. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-031161.

Tandon, A., Dhir, A., Talwar, S., Kaur, P., & Mäntymäki, M. (2021). Social media induced fear of missing out (FoMO) and phubbing: Behavioural, relational and psychological outcomes. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *174*, 121149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121149.

Thomas, R., & George, M. A. (2025). Fear of missing out (FOMO), emotional distress, and problematic social media use among university student. *Indian Journal of Psychiatric Social Work*, *16*(1), 14–22. https://doi.org/10.29120/ijpsw.2025.v16.i1.655.

Van Der Wal, A., Valkenburg, P. M., & Van Driel, I. I. (2024). In their own words: how adolescents use social media and how it affects them. *Social Media + Society*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241248591.

Vannucci, A., Flannery, K. M., & Ohannessian, C. M. (2016). Social media use and anxiety in emerging adults. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *207*, 163–166. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.08.040.

Yadav, S., & Khullar, L. (2024). Social Media and Adolescents: Exploring Links to Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. *Synergy: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, *1*(2), 29–45. Retrieved from https://sijmds.com/index.php/pub/article/view/19.

Copyrights