

The Impact of Online Fomo on Mental Health: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress in College Students

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dampak dari Ketakutan akan Ketinggalan Online (*Fear of Missing Out – FoMO Online*) terhadap kesehatan mental, khususnya depresi, kecemasan, dan stres, di kalangan mahasiswa di Universitas Pekalongan, Indonesia. Peningkatan penggunaan media sosial berkaitan dengan peningkatan tekanan emosional, terutama di kalangan anak muda, melalui mekanisme seperti perbandingan sosial dan stres digital. FoMO Online, sebuah fenomena kontemporer yang ditandai dengan kebutuhan obsesif untuk tetap terhubung, memiliki keterkaitan dengan penggunaan media sosial yang bermasalah dan penurunan kesejahteraan psikologis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, melakukan survei kepada 116 siswa menggunakan dua instrumen utama: Skala FoMO Online dan Skala DASS-42. Regresi linier berganda digunakan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara FoMO Online dan tiga variabel kesehatan mental. Teknik pengambilan sampel yang digunakan adalah non-random convenience sampling. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa FoMO secara signifikan memprediksi depresi ($R^2 = 0.132$), kecemasan ($R^2 = 0.157$), dan stres ($R^2 = 0.275$). Temuan ini sejalan dengan literatur yang ada yang menghubungkan FoMO dengan kelelahan media sosial, penggunaan teknologi yang bermasalah, dan penurunan harga diri.

Kata Kunci: *FoMO Online*, Depresi, Kecemasan, Stres, Mahasiswa, Media Sosial

Abstract

This study explores the impact of Online Fear of Missing Out (Online FoMO) on mental health outcomes, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress, among college students at Universitas Pekalongan, Indonesia. The proliferation of social media usage has been associated with an escalation in emotional distress, particularly among youth, through mechanisms such as social comparison and digital stress. Online FoMO, a contemporary phenomenon characterized by an obsessive need to remain connected, has been associated with problematic social media use and deteriorating psychological well-being. The study employed a quantitative approach, surveying 116 students using two primary instruments: the Online FoMO Scale and the DASS-42 Scale. The sampling technique used was non-random convenience sampling. Multiple linear regression was employed to analyze the relationship between Online FoMO and the three mental health variables. The findings indicated that FoMO significantly predicted depression ($R^2 = 0.132$), anxiety ($R^2 = 0.157$), and stress ($R^2 = 0.275$). These findings align with extant literature linking FoMO with social media fatigue, problematic technology use, and diminished self-esteem.

Key Words: Online FoMO, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, College Students, Social Media

A. Introduction

Social media use has become an integral part of daily life, with over 5 billion active users worldwide (Gökçearsan et al., 2023). The advent of social media has profoundly transformed the manner in which individuals interact, communicate, and perceive their social environments. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become integral to everyday life, with users increasingly dependent on these channels to stay informed, socially connected, and engaged. This rapid integration of social media into daily routines has given rise to concerns regarding its implications for mental health, especially in the context of persistent online connectivity and exposure to curated digital content (Elhai et al., 2021; Servidio et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, social media usage has increased in parallel with the growth in internet penetration. According to Kurniawan and Utami (2022), approximately 212.35 million individuals, constituting 76.8% of the population, were internet users as of 2021. A particularly active demographic within this group consists of adolescents and college students, with surveys indicating that 97% of Indonesian students are active social media users (Rosyida & Romadhani, 2022). Popular social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are frequently utilized by this demographic, often for extended periods. This intensive engagement with social media has contributed to increasing levels of emotional distress among youth, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Pertiwi et al., 2021; Gunawan et al., 2022).

The impact of social media on mental health is especially pronounced among adolescents and young adults—defined as the period from ages 18 to 25—in Indonesia, who are in a critical stage of identity formation and are highly sensitive to peer validation. This period is characterized by significant transitions, including the formation of identity. The use of social media has been demonstrated to exacerbate psychological distress in this developmental stage, primarily through the mechanisms of social comparison, peer pressure, and emotional instability (Aziz et al., 2024). This phenomenon aligns with global trends, where digital natives, particularly young individuals, demonstrate a heightened vulnerability to the psychological ramifications of hyperconnectivity, including elevated anxiety and stress associated with social media usage (Aziz et al., 2024).

Problematic social media use in this demographic also has been associated with emotional difficulties and psychological vulnerability, including low self-esteem and heightened susceptibility to peer pressure (Aziz et al., 2024). The constant exposure to idealized representations of others' lives has intensified experiences of social comparison, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy and isolation (Servidio et al., 2024). In Indonesia, a considerable proportion of the adolescent population (34.9%) encounters mental health challenges, with depression impacting approximately 6.2% of young people (Putri et al., 2022; Pertiwi et al., 2021). The mental health crisis among youth is further exacerbated by factors such as bullying,

poor family relationships, and the pressure to conform to social media standards, creating a particularly vulnerable group prone to depression (Putri et al., 2022).

A salient psychological construct that has emerged from this milieu is the FoMO, which is defined as the anxiety that arises when individuals perceive that they are missing out on meaningful social experiences or information (Elhai et al., 2021). Concurrent with this perspective, Abel et al. (2023) and Tandon et al. (2021) described FoMO as the anxiety experienced when individuals feel left out of important social experiences or information shared by others. The proliferation of curated content on social media platforms has further exacerbated this phenomenon by fostering a stream of idealized lifestyles and events. Consequently, individuals frequently experience a sense of obligation to maintain constant connectivity to avoid missing out on these perceived experiences (Alt, 2015 in Kurniawan & Utami, 2022).

This phenomenon has given rise to a new type of FoMO named Online FoMO, characterized by the stress and anxiety experienced when disconnected from digital platforms, prompting frequent checks for updates and notifications (Kurniawan & Utami, 2022). The incessant influx of content on social media platforms can engender a sense of exclusion among individuals who do not actively engage with these digital social networks (Tandon et al., 2021). The underlying cause of this phenomenon has been consistently associated with problematic social media use. Individuals who excessively engage with digital platforms to maintain social and informational connectedness often do so at the expense of their emotional well-being (Servidio et al., 2024).

A substantial body of research has identified a strong correlation between elevated levels of FoMO and an increased prevalence of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress (Dempsey et al., 2019; Elhai et al., 2021). The pressure to remain constantly updated, coupled with habitual social comparison, can lead to emotional distress, including diminished self-esteem, distorted body image, and heightened feelings of exclusion and loneliness (Gökçearslan et al., 2023; Servidio et al., 2024). Social comparison plays a pivotal mediating role in the association between FoMO and mental health, as individuals evaluate their own lives against idealized representations disseminated by others (Servidio et al., 2024). Social comparison theory posits that individuals assess their social value through comparisons with others, a process that is exacerbated by social media. A substantial body of research has identified a positive correlation between FoMO and low self-esteem, suggesting that individuals who experience high levels of FoMO may engage in constant self-comparison with idealized portrayals on social media, potentially leading to feelings of dissatisfaction and emotional distress (Dempsey et al., 2019; Servidio et al., 2024).

A notable psychological consequence of FoMO-driven digital engagement is digital stress, which encompasses anxiety and cognitive overload stemming from the compulsion to be perpetually connected and responsive (Rosyida & Romadhani, 2022). Digital stress comprises subcomponents such as availability stress, approval anxiety, and connection overload, which have been found to correlate strongly with symptoms of depression and social anxiety (Martinac Dorčić et al., 2024). These effects are particularly evident among adolescents and college students, who frequently use social media and are highly vulnerable to the psychological consequences of constant online interaction (Martinac Dorčić et al., 2024). The pursuit of social validation through likes, comments, and shares can further exacerbate emotional vulnerability and lead to a deterioration in mental well-being over time (Tandon et al., 2021).

In light of these dynamics, the present study aims to examine the impact of Online FoMO on mental health, specifically levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, among college students. In particular, the hypothesis of this study is that Online FoMO significantly predicts mental health problems, especially in the domains of depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. While prior studies have explored FoMO in relation to general mental health, this research uniquely focuses on the online dimension of FoMO, which is increasingly relevant in the digital age. The present study employs the Online FoMO Scale developed by Kurniawan & Utami (2022), a culturally adapted instrument designed to accurately assess FoMO within the Indonesian context, where social media usage is particularly pervasive.

B. Method

1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the impact of Online Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) on three mental health indicators: depression, anxiety, and stress. The research subjects involved a total of 116 students, consisting of men and women of

various ages who use social media. The collection of data was facilitated by two primary instruments: the online FoMO scale and the DASS-42 scale.

2. Participants (Population and Sample)

The sample consisted of college students aged 18 to 24 years, a typical age range for college students in Indonesia. Furthermore, all participants were required to be active social media users, engaging with digital platforms on a daily basis. This criterion was met because the study specifically explores the impact of Online FoMO associated with social media use.

3. Technique of Data Collection

The sampling technique employed in this study was non-random sampling, specifically convenience sampling, which is a type of sampling method where participants are selected based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher (Sugiyono, 2019). The researchers, in their capacity as lecturers, selected the participants from among the students. The purpose of using this technique was to enable the researchers to engage in further discussions with the students about their experiences while using social media, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the students' perspectives on the impact of social media on their mental health.

4. Instruments

The Online FoMO Scale employed in this study was adopted from Kurniawan & Utami (2022) to assess individual anxiety and stress triggered by the fear of missing out, particularly in the context of social media. This scale measures the extent to which individuals feel compelled to stay connected with online activities. Reliability measurements demonstrated satisfactory outcomes, with Cronbach's Alpha values for its dimensions (anxiety = 0.89, need to belong = 0.75, addiction = 0.76, and need for popularity = 0.69), yielding an overall reliability of 0.85.

The DASS-42 scale (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale) is a tool designed to assess the severity of symptoms related to depression, anxiety, and stress. This scale was initially developed by Lovibond & Lovibond and has been adapted into the Indonesian language by Damanik with a reliability score of 0.9483 (Damanik, 2011). Pertiwi et al. (2021) conducted a subsequent assessment of the scale's reliability, yielding satisfactory Cronbach's Alpha values (depression = 0.921, anxiety = 0.857, and stress = 0.899). The overall reliability of the DASS-42 measuring instrument alpha coefficient was determined to be 0.955.

5. Technique of Data Analysis

To assess the direct impact of Online FoMO on these three mental health variables, data analysis techniques were employed utilizing multiple linear regression. The conclusion of the results of this study will be carried out by interpreting the results of descriptive data analysis to reveal the answers to the hypotheses that have been determined.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Result

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) on three mental health outcomes: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. The analysis includes assumptions checks, model fitting, and interpretation of coefficients to explore how FOMO influences these outcomes.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (n=116)

Variables	Frequencies (%)	Mean + SD
Major		
Nursing student	58 (50%)	
Education Student	58 (50%)	
Sex		
Female	91 (78.4%)	
Male	25 (21.6%)	
Age		
< 18 years	6 (5.2%)	
18 – 20 years	79 (68.1%)	
21-22 years	31 (26.7%)	
Most preferred social media		

to access		
Whatsapp	27 (23.3%)	
Tiktok	55 (47.4%)	
Instagram	27 (23.3%)	
Youtube	4 (3.4%)	
Facebook	3 (2.6%)	
FoMO Score		46.57 + 12.900
Depression Score		15.96 + 9.221
Anxiety Score		17.93 + 8.111
Stress Score		19.34 + 8.323

The sample for this study consists of students from the nursing and education departments in equal numbers. The majority of the students are female (78.4%) and aged between 18 and 20 years (68.1%). The most prevalent social media platform utilized by the students is TikTok, with a usage frequency of 47.4%, followed by WhatsApp (23.3%) and Instagram (23.3%). The average Online FoMO score of the students is 46.57 ± 12.900 , which falls within the moderate category. The average depression score is 15.96 ± 9.221 , falling within the moderate category. The anxiety score is 17.93 ± 8.111 , indicating a severe category, and the stress score is 19.34 ± 8.323 , indicating a moderate category. Before proceeding with the analysis, several assumptions were checked to ensure the validity of the regression models:

Tabel 2. Assumption Checks for Normality, Multicollinearity, Homoscedasticity, and Autocorrelation

Assumption	Depression (Y1)	Anxiety (Y2)	Stress (Y3)
Normality (Shapiro-Wilk Test)	p = 0.593	p = 0.289	p = 0.201
Multicollinearity (VIF)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan Test)	p = 0.416	p = 0.152	p = 0.426
Autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson Test)	p = 1.758	p = 1.913	p = 1.916

The assumption checks confirm the validity of the regression models. The normality test shows that the residuals for all three outcomes—Depression, Anxiety, and Stress—are normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). The multicollinearity test indicates no issues, as the VIF for FOMO is 1.00 across all models. The homoscedasticity test reveals no issues with unequal variance ($p > 0.05$), and the autocorrelation test confirms no autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson values between 1.5 and 2.5), ensuring reliable regression results.

Depression (Y1)

Tabel 3. Model Summary for Depression

Metric	Value
R-squared	0.132
Adjusted R-squared	0.124
F-statistic	17.27
p-value (F-statistic)	< 0.001
Durbin-Watson	1.758

Tabel 4. Coefficients for Depression

Predictor	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	3.8921	3.014	1.291	0.199	[-2.078, 9.863]
FOMO (X)	0.2593	0.062	4.155	0.000	[0.136, 0.383]

For Depression, FOMO explains 13.2% of the variance ($R\text{-squared} = 0.132$). The relationship between FOMO and depression is significant, with a coefficient of 0.2593, meaning a unit increase in FOMO leads to a 0.2593 increase in depression scores. The model is statistically significant ($F\text{-statistic} = 17.27$, $p < 0.001$), but only a small proportion of the variance is explained, suggesting other factors also contribute to depression.

Anxiety (Y2)

Table 5. Model Summary for Anxiety

Metric	Value
R-squared	0.157
Adjusted R-squared	0.150
F-statistic	21.25
p-value (F-statistic)	1.06e-05
Durbin-Watson	1.913

Table 6. Coefficients for Anxiety

Predictor	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	6.3242	2.612	2.421	0.017	[1.150, 11.498]
FOMO (X)	0.2492	0.054	4.610	0.000	[0.142, 0.356]

For Anxiety, FOMO explains 15.7% of the variance (R-squared = 0.157). The coefficient for FOMO is 0.2492, indicating that higher FOMO leads to higher anxiety. The model is statistically significant (F-statistic = 21.25, $p < 0.001$), but again, a significant portion of the variance remains unexplained, pointing to other factors influencing anxiety levels. Overall, these results show that FOMO has a significant impact on anxiety levels. As FOMO increases, anxiety levels are likely to rise as well, although other factors could also influence anxiety, as indicated by the moderate R-squared value.

Stress (Y3)

Table 7. Model Summary for Stress

Metric	Value
R-squared	0.275
Adjusted R-squared	0.268
F-statistic	43.19
p-value (F-statistic)	1.55e-09
Durbin-Watson	1.916

Table 8. Coefficients for Stress

Predictor	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	3.5869	2.486	1.443	0.152	[-1.338, 8.512]
FOMO (X)	0.3382	0.051	6.572	0.000	[0.236, 0.440]

For Stress, FOMO explains 27.5% of the variance (R-squared = 0.275), the highest among the three outcomes. The coefficient for FOMO is 0.3382, meaning that increased FOMO is strongly associated with increased stress. The model is highly significant (F-statistic = 43.19, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that FOMO plays a major role in explaining stress levels.

Table 9. Summary of Model Fit and FOMO Coefficients

Outcome	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	F-statistic	p-value (F-statistic)	FOMO Coefficient	p-value (FOMO)
Depression (Y1)	0.132	0.124	17.27	< 0.001	0.2593	0.000
Anxiety (Y2)	0.157	0.150	21.25	1.06e-05	0.2492	0.000
Stress (Y3)	0.275	0.268	43.19	1.55e-09	0.3382	0.000

2. Discussion

The hypothesis stating that Online FoMO significantly predicts depression, anxiety, and stress among college students is supported by the findings of this study. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that Online FoMO has a statistically significant positive relationship with all three mental health variables. Online FOMO significantly influences Depression, Anxiety, and Stress, with the strongest impact on Stress

(explaining 27.5% of its variance). The models show that FOMO is positively associated with all three outcomes, suggesting that higher levels of FOMO lead to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. However, other unaccounted factors likely contribute to these mental health outcomes, as evidenced by the relatively modest R-squared values. As highlighted by Martinac-Dorcic et al. (2024), digital stress is a growing concern in the context of social media use, particularly among youth. Digital stress includes components such as availability stress, approval anxiety, and FoMO, all of which are significantly related to increased anxiety and depression symptoms (Martinac-Dorcic et al., 2024).

The present study identified a substantial positive correlation between Online FoMO and three significant indicators of mental health: depression, anxiety, and stress. These findings are consistent with the mounting global concern regarding the psychological implications of digital connectivity, particularly among college students who are extensively engaged in social media environments. The persistent need to stay connected to social media and fear of missing important updates contributes significantly to problematic smartphone use and social media addiction (Zhu & Xiong, 2022; Gul et al., 2022). A salient observation of the study was that FoMO exhibited a robust correlation with stress, with an R^2 value of 0.275. This was followed by its association with anxiety ($R^2 = 0.157$) and depression ($R^2 = 0.132$). This finding suggests that the psychological strain induced by digital hyperconnectivity manifests most acutely as stress.

The relationship between FoMO and mental health has been extensively documented in recent literature. Dempsey et al. (2019) emphasized that FoMO serves as a psychological vulnerability factor that mediates the link between social anxiety and problematic social media use. This mediation is crucial in understanding how emotional distress develops as a byproduct of compulsive digital behaviors. A pivotal psychological mechanism that underpins this phenomenon is social comparison. Servidio et al. (2024) have proposed that FoMO leads to increased social comparison, which in turn reduces self-esteem and contributes to problematic social media use. The present study's participants frequently reported feelings of inadequacy after viewing others' curated lives online, suggesting that low self-worth and emotional fatigue are outcomes of constant comparison.

Tandon et al. (2021) advanced this line of thinking by connecting FoMO to social media fatigue, stalking, and compulsive comparisons, which were corroborated in our findings as students found it difficult to disengage from their devices despite experiencing emotional exhaustion. The cyclical nature of FoMO and digital fatigue is further substantiated by Gökçearslan et al. (2023), who demonstrated that individuals with high FoMO exhibit attentional bias toward social media cues, thereby reinforcing the addictive cycle. Gugushvili et al. (2020) have developed a framework that demonstrates the role of problematic smartphone use in mediating the relationship between FoMO and emotional well-being, particularly through cyberspace-oriented relationships and physical symptoms. This finding offers a potential explanation for the reported emotional distress, sleep difficulties, and challenges in concentration and relaxation among participants who spent excessive time online.

From a behavioral perspective, Tao et al. (2024) and Anjani & Widyatama (2023) argued that digital fatigue and FoMO are amplified by information overload and habitual media consumption. The present study's participants reported analogous experiences, including feelings of being overwhelmed by incessant updates and feelings of anxiety when disconnected. These findings support the hypothesis that FoMO mediates the relationship between online saturation and psychological strain. The emotional burden of FoMO is also linked to platform-specific behavior. Durmuş et al. (2024) found that FoMO influences YouTube addiction and "online stickiness," particularly among individuals with low self-esteem and high loneliness—traits that were frequently implied in the respondents' narratives. In a similar vein, Wang et al. (2024) demonstrated that FoMO serves as a significant predictor of smartphone addiction, exacerbating emotional and behavioral dysregulation.

Conversely, a number of protective psychological factors have been identified as potential buffers against the effects of FoMO. As demonstrated by Hanifah et al. (2024), self-compassion and gratitude have been shown to play a significant role in mitigating FoMO and its associated psychological impacts. The multidimensionality of FoMO—comprising emotional (anxiety, loneliness), cognitive (social comparison), and behavioral (compulsive use) aspects—demands comprehensive interventions. There is a need for a

comprehensive intervention addressing social media design and individual behaviors to foster well-being. Studies highlight the efficacy of socio-technical interventions integrating strategies with tools in curbing FoMO. A notable example is the FoMO-R Method, which integrates social skills (e.g., self-regulation and social interaction management) with technical features (e.g., status settings and autoreply) to assist individuals in managing their online engagement and mitigating the adverse effects of FoMO (Alutaybi et al., 2020).

Recent studies have also identified several effective interventions, including mindfulness practices, digital detox programs, and media literacy education, that can counteract the adverse effects of social media use (Wu et al., 2025). Furthermore, fostering self-compassion and gratitude has been demonstrated to reduce FoMO by helping individuals appreciate their current social relationships and reducing the tendency to compare themselves to others (Rosyida & Romadhani, 2022). In Indonesia, where the youth demographic is highly active on social media, these interventions could play a vital role in promoting emotional resilience and improving mental well-being.

Research indicates gender-based differences in the experience and impact of FoMO. For instance, males tend to experience elevated levels of FoMO related to social status and online visibility, while females may be more sensitive to the emotional aspects of FoMO, such as the fear of not maintaining personal relationships or emotional bonds online (Gul et al., 2022). This observation aligned with the experiences reported by the participants, where male participants emphasized social status and online visibility, while female participants highlighted the emotional distress related to personal relationships on social media. This insight can inform interventions tailored to gender differences.

It has been demonstrated that not all social media engagement is detrimental. Active social media use, defined as activities such as posting, commenting, and direct communication, has been shown to alleviate FoMO by fostering meaningful social connections (Mao & Zhang, 2023). In contrast, passive use, characterized by scrolling through feeds without interaction, has been observed to exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and FoMO (Mao & Zhang, 2023). Consequently, it is imperative to promote active, engaged, and deliberate social media usage, as this can mitigate the adverse effects of FoMO and prevent the escalation to more severe internet addiction.

D. Conclusion

This study underscores the substantial impact of Online FoMO on the mental well-being of college students, particularly with regard to stress, anxiety, and depression. It emphasizes the necessity for educational and psychological strategies to address digital behaviors and promote emotional resilience. While the findings underscore FoMO's role as a predictor of emotional distress, there are several limitations to consider. The cross-sectional design precludes the ability to draw causal conclusions, as it fails to track changes over time. Additionally, the reliance on self-report data introduces potential biases related to social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on general social media usage, without differentiating between platforms or types of use, restricts the depth of insights that can be obtained. The use of convenience sampling, drawn from a specific group of students at Universitas Pekalongan, also limits the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the requirement for participants to be active social media users excludes those with minimal digital engagement, which may introduce a bias where the most engaged participants are over-represented. In conclusion, the incorporation of a more comprehensive model of digital behavior and emotional regulation has the potential to enhance the study's scope and depth.

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