



## Social media: Fomo (Fear of missing out) and mental health in adolescents

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### Abstract

This research paper tries to throw more light on negative aspect of Social media, which inculcate a “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) and directly or indirectly affects the mental health especially of adolescents. The FOMO develops Depression and anxiety and ultimately negatively affects the personality.

**Keywords:** Social Media, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), mental health, Adolescents

### Introduction

Today’s children and adolescents grow up in a world flooded with the mass media (television, films, videos, billboards, magazines, movies, music, newspapers, fashion designers and the Internet). Staggering statistics reveal that, on average, a child or adolescent watches up to 5 hours of television per day and spends an average of 6 to 7 h viewing the various media combined.

The popularity of social media is undeniable. However, there is an increasing debate surrounding the potential negative mental health effects due to the use of social media and specifically, the long-term use of social media contribute to higher rates of depression. When social media was first introduced, it was seen as a novel way to stay in touch across long distances as well as a new form of entertainment. However, there is a growing concern that social media is not an entirely positive experience. According to the American Psychiatry association (APA) over one-third (38%) of Americans believe that the use of social media has a negative impact on people’s mental health.

“FOMO is especially rampant in the millennial community because they see a fear achieving something they want, and somehow in their mind, that achievement means something taken away from them”- Darlene McLaughlin, MD, Texas A&M Health Science Centre College of Medicine

### FOMO (Fear of missing out)

The “fear of missing out” or FOMO is a well-known concept on the internet. The term was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013 and is loosely defined as an “Uneasy and sometime ill-consuming feeling” that people are missing out on what their peers are doing. Or, they are more in the “know”

about something better than you as an individual know. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a social anxiety stemmed from the belief that others might be having fun while the person experiencing the anxiety is not present. It is characterized by a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. FOMO is also defined as a fear of regret, which may lead to concerns that one might miss an opportunity for social interaction, a novel experience or a profitable investment. Some people occasionally have these feelings. However, intense feelings of FOMO might be a sign of general dissatisfaction with life or even an underlying condition. For example, people experiencing low-grade depression or dysthymia could possibly experience feelings of FOMO. They may think that everyone having fun and living their life to the fullest. Fear of Missing out (FOMO) is the tendency to experience anxiety over missing out on rewarding experiences of others. The fear of missing out refers to the feeling or perception that others are having more fun, living better lives, or experiencing better things than you are. It involves a deep sense of envy and affects self-esteem. It is often exacerbated by social media sites like Instagram and Facebook. Therefore, your sense of “normal” becomes skewed and you seem to be doing worse than your peers. You might see detailed photos of your friends enjoying fun times without you, which is something that people may not have been so readily aware of in past generations. Social media creates a platform for bragging; it is where things, events, and even happiness itself seems to be in competition at times. People are comparing their best, picture-perfect experiences, which may lead you to wonder what you are lacking.

This perception is not true, but if people are unhappy with their present circumstances may be more prone to experience these

feelings. Previous studies have linked the consumption of social media to a wide range of mental health conditions, ranging from anxiety and poorer sleep quality to inattention and hyperactivity. Researchers are finding that this *fear of missing out* is connected to social media use. These feelings strongly correlate to feelings of regret and social significance. As people consume large amounts of social media posts and tweets, they start to compare themselves physically and socially.

### **Mental health**

The WHO stress that mental health is “more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities.” Peak mental health is about not only avoiding active conditions but also looking after ongoing wellness and happiness. They also emphasize that preserving and restoring mental health is crucial on an individual basis, as well as throughout different communities and societies the world over.

### **FOMO and mental health**

FOMO can be experienced by people of all ages, several studies have found. One study in the *Psychiatry Research* (2020) journal found that the fear of missing out was linked to a greater smartphone and social media usage and that this link was not associated with age or gender. FOMO was related to fears of negative and even positive evaluations by others as well as linked to negative effects on mood. Increased in stress level, Girls experiencing depression tend to use social networking sites at a greater rate while, for boys, anxiety was a trigger for greater social media use. This shows that increased use of social media can lead to higher stress rates caused by FOMO. A recent survey found that 39% of Canada’s teens sleep with their cellphone. It seems FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is so prevalent in adolescents that not even sleep is off limits when it comes to staying connected and accessing their social networks. In fact, when teens and young adults live their lives through a virtual filter, they are prone to experience FOMO. And with at least 24% of teens online almost constantly, it should not be surprising that FOMO is reaching epidemic proportions.

These mental health issues can arise out of larger concerns surrounding inclusion and social standing. Heavily-edited social media images create feelings of a more perfect world where the viewer perhaps feels left out. Additional damaging feelings may arise from viewing individuals who are socially connected to the viewer, but the viewer is not part of the activity or event.

Glamorized social media posts may have a more profound influence on people who are already struggling with a sense of belonging as well as other negative emotions. In addition, the hostile environment, cyberbullying and exposure to toxic language that can occur on some social media platforms does not help. (Pew research centre 2015) seems to support this idea that social media carries certain mental health risks. They found that social media use actually creates more stress for individuals than they realize. This pattern was especially visible for women who used these platforms. In particular, they found the social media site Twitter to be one of the most stressful sites. Researchers theorize that seeing other people in stress is stressful, especially due to the fact that it increases the person’s awareness of another person’s stress.

A study out of the University of Pittsburgh school of Medicine (2019) discovered that participants who spent the greatest amount of time using social media platforms, were over twice as likely to experience negative emotions food and body image. However, study participants who spent less time on social media did not report these negative feelings and thoughts with the same frequency. This coincides with other studies that suggest that viewing pictures and videos of food could trigger physiological responses that lead to emotional eating behaviours. According to John M. Grohol, founder and Editor-in-Chief of Psych Central, FOMO may lead to a constant search for new connections with others, abandoning current connections to do so. University of Glasgow (2019) study surveyed 467 adolescents, and found that the respondents felt societal pressure to always be available. But FOMO is also a serious form of social anxiety which we’re all prone to experiencing. A recent study from the University of Glasgow found that students who were active and emotionally invested in their digital lives reported worse sleep, lower self-esteem and higher instances of anxiety and depression when compared to students who cared less or spent less time on social media.

### **Steps to minimise FOMO**

Fortunately, steps can be taken to curb your FOMO if it is something you experience.

In turn, greater engagement with social media can make us feel worse about ourselves and our lives, not better. In this way, it helps to know that our attempts to alleviate feelings of FOMO can actually lead to behaviours that exacerbate it. Understanding where the problem lies, however, can be a great first step in overcoming it. The following can help.

### **Focus on your plus points**

Rather than focusing on your lacunae, try noticing what you are gifted with and what you have. This is easier said than done on social media, where we may be bombarded with images of things we do not have, but it can be done. Add more positive people to your feed; hide people who tend to brag too much or who are not supportive of you.

### **Keep a Journal**

It is common to post on social media to keep a record of the fun things you do. However, you may find yourself noticing a little too much about whether people are validating your experiences online. If this is the case, you may want to take some of your photos and memories offline and keep a personal journal of your best memories, either online or on paper.

### **Find out real connections**

Find the real connections, avoid fake connections which will drain your energy, time and peace of mind. Whatever limited real friends you have go with them on outing, dating and fun and enjoy real life.

### **Show gratitude**

Studies show that engaging in gratitude-enhancing activities like telling others what you appreciate about them can lift your spirits as well as those of everyone around you. This is partially because it is harder to feel as if you lack the things you need in life when you are focused on the abundance you already have.

It also holds true because making others feel good makes us feel good. A lift in mood may be just what you need to relieve yourself of feeling depressed or anxious. You likely will not feel as tempted to go down the rabbit hole of social networking and FOMO when you realize how much you already have. You will begin to feel that you have what you need in life and so do other people. This can be wonderful for your mental and emotional health.

### **Live in the real world**

Acknowledge that you cannot always live in a fairy world. You have to admit and accept the reality which will help you to tackle the problem easily.

Let's get real, and say it with me: "I cannot be everywhere at all times and always be doing the coolest thing ever. And that's OK." Doesn't that feel better? Admitting and accepting that you have anxiety can feel like your secret has been unleashed to the universe and the burden is off your shoulders. You're acknowledging the insecurity, and with that recognition you can now tackle the problem.

### **Fix the chatting time**

Learn to limit your social media activity. One CBT (cognitive-behavioural therapy) technique prescribes setting aside a certain time of day to check all your social media outlets.

### **Practice mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a therapeutic technique that refers to a non-judgmental observation or awareness that is focused on the present experience. Try this mindfulness immersion exercise: Take a mundane daily activity like washing the dishes and try to sense the muscles you use to wash, the scent of the soap, and the feeling of bubbles between your fingers. Rather than multitasking or hurrying up this task to get on to the next one,

### **Unplug**

As the research cited above shows, limiting social media use increases well-being and reduces FOMO. Parents need to set healthy tech boundaries for teens to protect them from the negative impact of FOMO.

**Get outside:** Go out and interact with Nature, this will save you from negative impact of Smartphone.

### **Acknowledgement**

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