THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FOMO: UNDERSTANDING THE FEAR OF MISSING OUT

Умарова Юлдуз Бахтияровна
Старший преподаватель института ISFT
E-mail: yulduzshahlo@gmail.com
Abdurahmonova Munisa
ISFT Institute Philology faculty 2 course
gmail.com

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) tushunchasi va uning psixologik jihatlari ko'rib chiqiladi. FOMOning onlayn ijtimoiy faollik, muammoli internet foydalanish va salbiy hissiyotlar bilan bog'liqligi o'rganiladi. Bundan tashqari, FOMOning sabablarini o'rganish va uning texnologiya bilan bog'liq muammolarni qanday yuzaga keltirishi muhokama qilinadi. Kelajakdagi tadqiqot yo'nalishlari va FOMO ta'sirini kamaytirish bo'yicha amaliy strategiyalar ham taklif etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: FOMO, psixologiya, ijtimoiy faollik, salbiy hissiyotlar, muammoli texnologiyalarni qo'llash.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается психологический феномен "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO). Анализируются связи FOMO с онлайновой социальной активностью, проблемным использованием интернета и негативными эмоциями. Обсуждаются причины FOMO и его влияние на проблемы, связанные с технологиями. Также предлагаются направления для будущих исследований и практические стратегии для снижения влияния FOMO.

Ключевые слова: FOMO, психология, социальная активность, негативные эмоции, проблемное использование технологий.

Abstract: This article discusses the fear of missing out (FOMO) on rewarding experiences, an important psychological construct in contemporary times. We present an overview of the FOMO construct and its operational definition and measurement. Then, we review recent empirical research on FOMO's relationship with levels of online social engagement, problematic technology and internet communication use, negative affectivity, and sociodemographic variables. Additionally, we discuss theoretical conceptualizations regarding possible causes of FOMO and how FOMO may drive problematic internet technology use. Finally, we discuss future directions for the empirical study of FOMO.

Keywords: FOMO, psychology, social activity, negative emotions, problematic use of technology.

Introduction. The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on rewarding experiences has gained significant attention in recent research. FOMO is primarily driven by the perceived need to stay constantly connected to one's social network, often leading to frequent (and in some cases, excessive) use of social networking sites (SNS) and messaging services. This heightened interest in FOMO coincides with ongoing societal

debates about the potential harms of excessive screen time for both children and adults. Despite this growing focus, there has yet to be a comprehensive review paper synthesizing the existing research on FOMO. This paper aims to define and explore the FOMO concept, its theoretical foundations, and to examine recent empirical findings on how FOMO relates to online social engagement, problematic internet use (PIU), negative emotions, and sociodemographic factors.

Background, definition of FOMO

FOMO was first introduced in the media in the early 2010s, during a period when the use of social networking sites (SNS) was rapidly increasing worldwide. The widespread availability of smartphones made it easier for individuals to learn about potentially rewarding experiences, both online and offline, that they might be missing. As a result, FOMO quickly became associated with anxiety in popular media. FOMO is defined in the scientific literature as having two main components: a) the anxiety that others are experiencing rewarding events that one is excluded from, and b) the constant desire to stay connected with one's social network. The first component reflects the cognitive aspect of anxiety, such as worry and rumination. The second component is a behavioral response aimed at reducing this anxiety, similar to the compulsive behaviors seen in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which are meant to alleviate anxiety in a maladaptive way. In the context of FOMO, this behavior often manifests as the frequent checking of social networking sites (SNS) and messaging services to maintain connections and prevent missing out on rewarding experiences.

The behavior of constantly checking online is not only active—when people intentionally browse their smartphones or other devices—but also reactive, triggered by the many social notifications that arrive throughout the day, to which individuals feel compelled to respond. These notifications can be beneficial for social engagement and are often viewed positively, as they help ease the feelings of FOMO.

Online social interactions can contribute positively to social capital for many individuals. However, the disruptive nature of smartphone and computer notifications, along with the associated habit of frequently checking them, can have negative effects. These notifications often lead to distractions, reducing focus and impairing daily activities such as work, school, and other responsibilities. This is due to "switching costs," where it becomes difficult to resume tasks after being interrupted. As a result, the fear of missing out (FOMO) can drive excessive checking of social media notifications, making it challenging to stay productive. In light of this, there is increasing debate over the need to regulate features in social media apps that trigger FOMO, as these features are designed to maximize user engagement and collect personal data, contributing to the broader issue of surveillance capitalism.

Problematic use of internet technology.

It's important to distinguish between healthy and maladaptive internet use, including social networking sites (SNS). While higher levels of social media use are not inherently harmful, they can become problematic if excessive. Problematic Internet Use (PIU) occurs when overuse leads to negative effects, similar to those seen in addictive behaviors like

drug and alcohol use. These effects can include withdrawal symptoms when access is restricted, the need for more time online to achieve the same emotional relief, and functional impairments, such as problems at work or in social settings. While only problematic internet gaming use is currently an official medical diagnosis, excessive use of other technologies like smartphones and SNS can also have serious health and functional consequences.

The concept of problematic smartphone use (PSU), also referred to as smartphone addiction or smartphone use disorder, remains a subject of ongoing debate. Recent reviews of problematic internet use (PIU) have included smartphone and SNS usage, exploring the relationship between problematic use and various psychological constructs, including psychopathological factors. Research indicates significant overlap between PSU and PIU, with correlations around 0.50 in recent studies. Many of these studies have adapted diagnostic criteria originally developed for substance use disorders to assess problematic use of specific technologies.

Empirical research has also examined the link between FOMO and problematic SNS use, predominantly using self-report surveys with a correlational, cross-sectional design. Several studies have found moderate to strong positive associations between FOMO and problematic SNS use in various populations, including school-aged adolescents, college students, and adults. For instance, Dempsey et al. identified a Pearson correlation of 0.32 between the FOMO Scale developed by Przybylski et al. and the six-item Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale. These findings suggest that FOMO is not only associated with increased frequency of SNS use but also with higher levels of problematic use.

Many studies have also examined FOMO in relation to levels of problematic smartphone use. These studies predominantly utilize self-report methods and employ a correlational, cross-sectional research design. Across a wide range of age groups, many studies have identified moderate to strong positive correlations between FOMO and problematic smartphone use. In addition to its link with problematic smartphone use, FOMO has also been associated with other negative effects. For instance, FOMO is positively correlated with disruptions in daily activities caused by smartphone notifications, as well as with distracted pedestrian behavior while using smartphones.

Negative affectivity and demographics.

FOMO is often understood as a construct linked to anxiety-related psychopathology, with anxiety disorders being a core aspect of underlying negative affectivity. As a result, research has explored the relationship between FOMO and the severity of anxiety symptoms, including social anxiety, in both adolescent and adult populations. These studies, which typically employ correlational, cross-sectional designs, consistently demonstrate moderate to strong positive associations between FOMO and anxiety severity.

Furthermore, given the high correlation and comorbidity between anxiety and depression, which are both fundamental elements of negative affectivity, FOMO has also been studied in relation to depression. In these studies, which span adolescence through

adulthood, moderate positive associations have been observed between FOMO and depression symptom severity. This suggests that FOMO is not only linked to anxiety but also to depressive symptoms, reinforcing its connection to broader emotional and psychological distress.

FOMO has also been investigated for relations with variables involving the opposite of negative affectivity – namely, perceived quality of life. These studies have used cross-sectional methods similar to those of most of the previously mentioned studies. Specifically, FOMO ha shown mild to moderate inverse correlations with life satisfaction. Furthermore, mild to moderate inverse associations have been found between FOMO and emotional well-being.

Finally, FOMO has been associated with particular demographic characteristics in a small number of studies with correlational, cross-sectional designs. FOMO has been correlated with younger age in some studies, and others have found it to be more related to females than males.

Conclusions and future directions.

FOMO is a significant psychological construct in the digital age, and it has been extensively studied and validated worldwide using both self-report psychological scales and physiological monitoring. Research supports the idea that FOMO is linked to increased frequency of social media use, higher levels of problematic SNS and smartphone use, and more severe anxiety, depression, and negative affectivity. Additionally, FOMO has been associated with lower perceived quality of life, indicating its broad impact on emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction.

Future research could explore unanswered questions regarding the FOMO construct. Nearly all work assessing the relations between FOMO and high or problematic levels of technology use has involved self-reported behavior as the dependent variable. In particular, digital phenotyping could help the psychological sciences overcome some of the problems arising from self-report methods, such as problems self-assessing a construct such as FOMO and the tendency to answer questions in socially desirable ways.100 We are aware of only one FOMO study that has objectively measured internet technology use (smart-phone), finding that FOMO was related to higher level of use.

Finally, future research should explore other psychological factors that may be associated with FOMO, such as behavioral activation, which is important for treating major depressive disorder, and the need for physical touch. Additionally, the design of smartphone apps that reduce FOMO by limiting or batching interruptive notifications should be investigated. We hope that improvements in research methods will deepen our understanding of FOMO and its relationship with relevant psychological constructs, leading to more effective strategies for managing its impact.

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