

Research Article

Fear of Missing Out and Problematic Social Media Use: A Literature Review

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ORCIDFarah Farida Tantiani: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4300-914X>**Abstract.**

The development of digital technology and social media has had a significant impact on human behavior, including the emergence of the phenomena of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU). This literature review aims to analyze the relationship between FOMO and PSMU and the factors that influence them. The results show that FOMO, the anxiety of missing out on information or experiences, is a strong predictor of PSMU, which is characterized by excessive, compulsive and disruptive use of social media in daily life. FOMO not only increases the intensity of social media use but is also associated with psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem and sleep disturbances. Internal factors such as neuroticism, boredom, and unmet psychological needs, as well as external factors such as peer influence and online culture, reinforce this relationship. Some studies have also identified the mediating role of state-FOMO and trait-FOMO in exacerbating PSMU tendencies. On the other hand, interventions such as physical activity, digital literacy and mindfulness practices can help reduce the negative impact of FOMO and PSMU. These findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in understanding and treating PSMU, taking into account psychological, social, and cultural aspects.

Keywords: problematic social media use, fear of missing out, social media

1. Introduction

The development of the times supports the development of increasingly sophisticated technology in society, where the current era of digitalization has brought about various types of technology, including social media, as a means to meet human needs and achieve life goals. A survey from We Are Social shows that social media users in Indonesia have reached 191.4 billion, with an increase of approximately +12.6% from the previous year, and an average usage intensity of 3 hours 17 minutes per day (1). Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, X, and Telegram have become highly useful tools for communication, indirect interaction, and sharing creative content accessible to internet users worldwide, with over 3.5 billion people now utilizing these platforms globally (2). TikTok offers various features and engaging content such as health education, cuisine, daily life, dance, celebrity news,

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and lifestyle, which are the main attractions for people to continue actively accessing and sharing experiences on this platform.

Over time, the popularity of social media has increased because it brings convenience to people's lives, work, and learning. Specifically that early adulthood social media use can increase creative ideas, serve as a means of entertainment, and provide easy access to information (3). Upon observation, most social media users tend to overuse social media, which eventually leads to addictive behavior (4). Excessive use of social media can trigger problems in its use, known as problematic social media use (PSMU)(5). Problematic social media use is defined as excessive attention to social media resulting from an uncontrollable urge to use social media, causing individuals to spend most of their time and energy on social media, thus interfering with productivity, interpersonal relationships, and mental health (6).

PSMU is often referred to as social media addiction because it is characterized by compulsive behavior that resembles the symptoms of addiction to illegal substances, such as tolerance, withdrawal, motivational significance, and functional impairment (7). The symptoms of PSMU are similar to those of substance users, where individuals overuse social media to alter their mood. As a result, when individuals attempt to stop using social media, they tend to fail and experience relapse (2). Problematic social media users often experience mood swings, they will feel very happy when using social media and develop negative feelings when unable to access their social media (8).

Individuals are considered to have PSMU if they exhibit behavioral components such as salience (being preoccupied with social media), mood modification (using social media to reduce negative feelings), tolerance (increased amount of activity in using social media), withdrawal symptoms (feeling depressed when not using social media), conflict (sacrificing other important areas of life due to social media use), and relapse (failure in attempts to control social media use) (9). PSMU impacts mental health and well-being, such as headaches, neck pain, poor sleep, irritability, anxiety, and loneliness (10). Among adolescents with PSMU, the effects experienced include an inability to regulate their heart rate, feeling anxious and uncomfortable when social media use is restricted, constantly thinking about social media, and a lack of direct interaction in social environments (11).

Previous research has found that PSMU has a negative impact on mental health, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, social isolation, and sleep disturbances (12). Among university students, PSMU can lead to decreased academic performance,

sleep disturbances, and difficulties in building direct interpersonal relationships (13). In its development, PSMU occurs due to various factors, including external and internal factors. External factors include family, friends, and macro factors. Family factors include childhood abuse, low family functioning, and lack of support received. Peer factors include lack of support from friends. Finally, macro factors include the normalization of surveillance culture, which involves online comparisons and allows individuals to monitor others' activities through social media (14).

On the other hand, internal factors include the fear of missing out (FoMo). FoMo is defined as anxiety that arises from the fear of being left behind when other people experience things, such as memorable experiences, while the individual cannot experience them, giving rise to the desire to always be connected and follow what is happening on social media (15). FoMo can also be understood as a form of anxiety about losing valuable experiences caused by an individual's desire for interpersonal relationships, which is based on the human need to belong and the innate motivation inherent in humans (5). To fulfill these needs, individuals ultimately seek access to social groups both through offline and online means, namely through the use of social media. Individuals are indicated to experience FoMo if they have a desire to feel, follow, and stay updated with various things on social media (16). The emergence of FoMo behavior in individuals is triggered by various factors, one of which, according to JWT Intelligence, is the factor of information disclosure on social media (17).

The growing influence of social media also triggers FoMo behavior. In addition, unmet psychological needs for relatedness or connection also trigger FoMo behavior. Individuals with unmet connection needs will feel anxious and try to find out about other people's activities and experiences through social media. Not only that, the need for self related to autonomy and competence is also a trigger for FoMo behavior. If this need for self is not met, individuals will do the same thing, which is to search for and collect various information about other individuals through social media. Finally, the social one-upmanship factor, which is the behavior of individuals who try to prove themselves better than others in terms of actions, words, or other things, also triggers FoMo behavior (16). FoMo behavior among TikTok users can be observed in various forms, such as the desire to follow viral content, spending a significant amount of time watching videos on TikTok, commenting on, and sharing TikTok video content (18).

Various studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between FoMo and PSMU. One previous study found that FoMo is a significant predictor of social media addiction, with individuals who exhibit higher levels of FoMo tending to exhibit

more compulsive and problematic social media use behaviors (19). In line with this, other studies have shown that FoMo encourages excessive social media use, leading to addiction that ultimately results in negative outcomes such as stress, depression, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic performance, especially among students (20). FoMo not only triggers intensive social media use, but also affects students' psychological and academic aspects (21). Among teenage TikTok users, FoMo also plays a similar role, encouraging excessive TikTok use even when the teenagers are under parental supervision (22). From these studies, it can be seen that FoMo does contribute to excessive and problematic social media use. This literature review was conducted to understand the role of FoMo in PSMU. Through this literature review, the expected benefit is for social media users to develop self-awareness to better manage their time and social media usage behavior.

2. Literature Review

Some experts have different opinions in defining problematic social media use. In 2014, Andreassen & Pallesen defined problematic social media use (PSMU) as excessive attention to social media as a result of uncontrollable urges to log on and use social media, resulting in a person spending most of their time and energy on social media, thus interfering with productivity, real-life interpersonal relationships and development, and mental health (6). Problematic social media use (PSMU) is often referred to as social media disorder, social media addiction, and social networking addiction. Problematic social media use (PSMU) is a problematic social media use behaviour characterised by a lack of control over behaviour, where the behaviour continues despite adverse consequences for the user's life (5).

It was stated by Griffiths in 2005 that the symptoms of individuals with PSMU are similar to those of substance use addiction which consist of salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptom, conflict, and relapse. Salience is characterised by social media being important and already dominating the individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Mood Modification, refers to the subjective experience that individuals feel as an effect of social media use. Tolerance, the process by which individuals require increased activity on social media networks in order to continue to obtain the effects of pleasure or mood modification. Withdrawal Symptoms, unpleasant feelings and physical effects that arise when individuals are unable to access social media networks such as anxiety, moodiness, irritability, and body trembling. Conflict, refers to individual conflicts

with other individuals in the surrounding environment, conflicts with other activities, and conflicts with oneself caused by the use of social media networks that consume too much of an individual's time. Relapse, a condition where individuals have a tendency to re-access social media excessively after individuals have not accessed for some time (9).

Problematic social media use occurs because it is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors such as FoMo, and external factors include family, friends, and macros. FoMo as an internal factor is a form of self-anxiety when seeing other individuals have more interesting experiences and is characterised by a desire to continue to connect with other individuals (23). Alwisol defines FoMo as a fear that arises psychologically in the need to stay connected but is not fulfilled, resulting in anxiety when not using social media (20). FoMo is based on Self Determination Theory (SDT), where FoMo related to social media occurs due to unfulfilled psychological needs in self and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others). In 2013, Przybylski described the characteristics of FoMo behaviour as excessive and unconscious use of social media, ambivalent feelings towards social media and frequent use of social media, and lack of self-control to reply to messages, check texts and emails even while driving. These characteristics affect the level of satisfaction, mood and low life satisfaction, so that individuals are motivated to use social media frequently.

3. Method

The researchers chose a literature review as the method for this study, this method aims to synthesise the results of previous studies that address the same topic. The sources used in this literature review were collected through searches on Google Scholar using keywords such as problematic social media use and FOMO. The researcher imposed limitations on the sources used, specifically the publication years ranging from 2015 to 2025, ensuring that the sources remain relevant to current conditions. Overall, the sources used for the literature review employ both qualitative and quantitative methods, selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria established by the researcher. The inclusion criteria used are studies related to problematic social media use and FOMO. Based on the search results and selection process, approximately 10 articles meeting the criteria were identified and will serve as sources for this literature review.

4. Result and Discussion

TABLE 1:

No.	Author	Title	Year	Result
1.	Vittoria Franchina, Mariek Vanden Abeele, Antonius J. van Rooij, Gianluca Lo Coco, Lieven De Marez	Fear of Missing Out as a Predictor of Problematic Social Media Use and Phubbing Behavior among Flemish Adolescent	2018	The results show that fear of missing out is a significant positive predictor of the frequency of use of various social media platforms (depth) and the number of social media platforms actively used (breadth). Fear of missing out more strongly predicted the use of personalised and private social media platforms compared to more public platforms. Not only that, adolescents with higher levels of fear of missing out reported higher levels of problematic social media use. Thus, fear of missing out indirectly predicts phubbing behaviour through problematic social media use. Overall, this study supports that fear of missing out is an important factor explaining social media use among adolescents and its relationship with problematic social media use.
2.	Sameha Alshakshi, Areej Babiker, Christian Montag, Raian Ali	On the Association between Personality, Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) and Problematic Social Media Use Tendencies in European and Arabian Samples	2023	The results showed that there is a significant relationship between personality, particularly neuroticism, and PSMU in European and Arab samples, where FoMo plays an important mediator role in the relationship. In both cultural groups, neuroticism had a significant total effect on PSMU, but the mediating mechanism of FoMo was different. In the European sample, the effect of neuroticism on PSMU was fully mediated by FoMo, whereas in the Arab sample, FoMo only partially mediated, and there was still a direct influence of neuroticism on PSMU.
3.	Rocco Servidio, Beatrix Koronczi, Mark D. Griffiths, Zsolt Demetrovics	Problematic Smartphone Use and Problematic Social Media Use: The Predictive Role of Self-Construal and the Mediating Effect of Fear Missing Out	2022	PSU and PSMU are significantly influenced by cell-construal type, which is how individuals perceive their relationships with others. The analysis showed that individuals with independent self-construal tend to have higher levels of FoMo, which in turn increases the risk of PSU and PSMU. Conversely, independent self-construal is negatively associated with FoMo. Mediation analyses in this study revealed that FoMo fully mediated the relationship between interdependent self-construal and PSU, as well as partially mediated the relationship between interdependent self-construal and PSMU. These findings confirm that personality characteristics related to self-construal and FoMO are important factors that need to be considered in efforts to prevent addictive behaviour towards technology among university students.

TABLE 1: Continued.

No.	Author	Title	Year	Result
4.	Anastasios Dadiotis & Petros Roussos	Relationship between FoMo, Problematic Social Media Use, Self-Esteem, Negative Affectivity, and Physical Exercise: A Structural Equation Model	2024	The results show that FoMo has a significant relationship with PSMU, negative affectivity, and self-esteem. The duration of social media use and the number of platforms actively used partially mediated the relationship between FoMO and PSMU. Meanwhile, PSMU also partially mediated the relationship between FoMO and negative affectivity. In addition, self-esteem was found to partially mediate the relationship between FoMO and negative affectivity, and negative affectivity fully mediated the relationship between FoMO and sleep disturbance. Another important finding is that exercise acts as a protective factor that can reduce FoMO levels.
5.	Yan-Yu Li, Ina M. Koning, Catrin Finkenauer, Maartje Boer, Regina J.J.M. van den Eijnden	The Bidirectional Relationships between Fear of Missing Out, Problematic Social Media Use and Adolescents Well Being: A Random Intercept Cross-Lagged Panel Model	2024	The results showed that at the individual level, FoMO significantly predicted increased PSMU during adolescence. In addition, low life satisfaction in early adolescence also predicted increased FoMO, signalling that adolescents who are less satisfied with their lives tend to experience higher FoMO. These findings confirm that FoMO acts as an important risk factor for PSMU, while low life satisfaction may be a trigger for FoMO.
6.	Jennifer Packer & Mal Flack	The Role of Self-Esteem, Depressive Symptoms, Extraversion, Neuroticism and FoMo in Problematic Social Media Use: Exploring User Profiles	2023	PSMU is closely related to a combination of psychological factors, namely self-esteem, depressive symptoms, extraversion, neuroticism, and fear of missing out (FoMo). This study successfully identified five profiles of social media users with different levels of PSMU, namely the FOMO profile (high FoMO level, high neuroticism, low self-esteem, and high depressive symptoms), Emotionally Vulnerable profile (very low self-esteem and high depression), Low-risk profile (low PSMU risk level), Low Extraversion profile (low extraversion), and Protective profile (high self-esteem and low FoMO). These results confirm that the severity of PSMU is not only influenced by one psychological factor in isolation, but rather by the convergence of several risk factors at once, with profiles with high FoMO and emotional vulnerability showing the highest levels of PSMU.
7.	Lei Zhao	The Relationship among Self-Esteem, Fear of Missing Out, and Problematic Social Media Use in Chinese College Students: a Cross-Lagged Analysis	2024	The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant decrease in students' self-esteem level, while FoMo and PSMU increased significantly over time. This study also found a negative predictive relationship between self-esteem and PSMU, and a positive predictive relationship between FoMo and PSMU. These findings indicate that college students with low self-esteem are more likely to engage in PSMU, while FoMo may encourage increased intensity of social media use.

TABLE 1: Continued.

No.	Author	Title	Year	Result
8.	Afsane Yoosef, Shima Shakiba, Hamidreza Hassanabadi, Behrooz Dolatshahi, Mark D. Griffiths, Balal Izanloo, Fahime Maleki	Psychological Distress, Interpersonal Sensitivity, and Trait-FoMO with Problematic Use of Social Media: The Mediating Roles of Boredom and State-FoMO	2024	The results of the analyses showed that there were significant relationships between PSMU and depression, stress, and interpersonal sensitivity, where boredom and state-FOMO served as mediators in these relationships. Although anxiety did not show a significant direct relationship with PSMU, boredom was shown to mediate the relationship between depression and stress with PSMU. In addition, trait-FOMO as a predisposing variable and state-FOMO as a mediating variable had significant relationships with PSMU.
9.	Xuemei Gao, Jiayu Li, Xujia Bai, Yuhong Zhou & Xintong Jiang	Understanding Daily Problematic Social Media Use of Young Adults: the Role of Trait- and State-Fear of Missing Out	2025	The results of the analyses indicated that FOMO contributed significantly to PSMU, where boredom and state-FOMO served as mediators in this relationship. The findings suggest that individuals with high levels of FOMO tend to experience greater boredom, which in turn increases their propensity to engage in PSMU. In addition, this study found that although trait-FOMO did not directly predict PSMU, state-FOMO had a significant influence in strengthening the relationship between boredom and PSMU.
10.	Renny Thomas & Mariya Alice George	Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Emotional Distress, and Problematic Social Media Use among University Student	2025	The results of the analyses showed that higher levels of FoMo were significantly associated with increased emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and stress, and contributed to PSMU. The study also identified gender differences, with female students reporting higher levels of anxiety compared to male students. These findings highlight the psychological impact of FoMo on college students' mental health and social media use, and the importance of targeted interventions, such as digital literacy programmes and mindfulness practices, to help college students cope with FoMo and reduce reliance on social media, thereby improving their mental well-being.

Based on the collected literature, it can be seen that FoMo significantly predicts PSMU across different age groups and contexts. Research consistently shows that individuals with higher levels of FoMo tend to show high engagement in frequency of social media use and number of platforms used. This trend can be observed in adolescents, college students, and social media users in general. Furthermore, some studies also highlight how FoMo not only predicts the quantity of social media use, but also its quality. Furthermore, this review highlights the complex interactions between FoMo and psychological factors that influence PSMU. Whereas, personality traits such

as neuroticism, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms were shown to strengthen the relationship between FoMo and PSMU.

The initial research conducted yielded findings that FoMo was a significant predictor of the frequency and extent of social media use among adolescents. The findings not only confirm that adolescents with high FoMo engage more frequently in social media, but also highlight nuances in the use of different platforms, with FoMo being a stronger predictor of private and privacy platform use. The implication of these findings is that FoMo may encourage adolescents to seek validation and social connection through social media, which may increase the risk of PSMU (5). Regardless, other studies have successfully highlighted the role of neuroticism, a personality trait characterised by a tendency to experience negative emotions, as an important risk factor for PSMU. The present study found that FoMo plays a mediating role in the relationship between neuroticism and PSMU, especially in European samples, where the effect of neuroticism on PSMU was fully explained by FoMo. These findings suggest that individuals with high neuroticism may be more prone to FoMo as they are more likely to worry about social rejection and negative evaluations, which then drives them to overuse social media as a coping mechanism (24).

The next study introduced the concept of self-construal, which refers to the way individuals view themselves in relation to others. The results of this study showed that individuals with an independent self-construal (which emphasises individuality and autonomy) tend to have higher levels of FoMo, which in turn increases the risk of PSMU. In contrast, individuals with an interdependent self-concept (which emphasises connectedness and social harmony) tend to have lower levels of FoMo. These findings highlight the importance of cultural factors and self-concept in understanding individuals' propensity towards PSMU (25).

Then there is research that presents a comprehensive structural model integrating FoMo, PSMU, self-esteem, negative affect, and physical activity. The results show that FoMo has a significant relationship with PSMU, negative affect, and self-esteem, and the duration of social media use and the number of actively used platforms partially mediate the relationship between FoMo and PSMU. An interesting finding of this study is the role of physical activity as a protective factor that can reduce FoMo levels. The implication of these findings is that interventions that promote physical activity may be an effective strategy to reduce FoMo and PSMU, especially among adolescents and young adults (26).

In addition, there is research that identifies different profiles of social media users based on a combination of psychological factors, including self-esteem, depressive symptoms, extraversion, neuroticism, and FoMo. Results from this study showed that individuals with the 'FoMo' profile (which is characterised by high levels of FoMo, high neuroticism, low self-esteem, and high depressive symptoms) and the 'Emotionally Vulnerable' profile (which is characterised by very low self-esteem and high depression) showed the highest levels of PSMU. These findings emphasise the importance of considering the complex interactions between various psychological factors in understanding and treating PSMU (27).

It was found in a study that there is a reciprocal relationship between FoMo and adolescent well-being, where FoMo predicts an increase in PSMU over time, and low life satisfaction in early adolescence also predicts an increase in FoMo. These findings suggest that FoMo and low life satisfaction may reinforce each other, creating a vicious cycle detrimental to adolescent well-being (28). In addition, two other studies highlighted the role of boredom and state-FoMo (situational FoMo) as mediators between trait-FoMo (FoMo as a personality trait) and PSMU (29). These findings suggest that individuals with high trait-FoMo are more likely to experience boredom, which then increases their tendency to engage in PSMU (30). Subsequent studies found that state-FoMo plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between boredom and PSMU, suggesting that momentary feelings of loss can trigger problematic social media use, especially when individuals are bored. Overall, this literature review provides strong evidence of the complexity of the relationship between FoMo and PSMU, which is influenced by various psychological, social and situational factors (30).

5. Conclusion

From this literature, it can be concluded that FoMo is a key factor that triggers PSMU characterized by excessive, compulsive, and disruptive use of social media in daily life. FoMo not only increases the frequency and intensity of social media use, especially among adolescents and young adults, but is also closely related to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, and decreased self-esteem and life satisfaction. Psychological factors such as neuroticism, boredom and self-construal reinforce this relationship, while external factors such as lack of social support and a culture that encourages online comparison also play a role. Research has also identified that state-FoMo and trait-FoMo can exacerbate PSMU, especially when individuals feel isolated

or have unmet psychological needs. However, interventions such as physical activity, digital literacy and mindfulness practices can be a solution to reduce the negative impact of FoMo and PSMU. Therefore, it is important to deeply understand the complex relationship between these psychological, social and situational factors to develop effective prevention and treatment strategies for social media users.

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