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I have so much FOMO! An exploration into psychological variables influencing fear of missing out and Snapchat intensity†

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Highlights:

- Increased fear of missing out predicted higher Snapchat intensity.
- Social comparison trait is positively related to fear of missing out.
- Satisfaction with life negatively predicts fear of missing out.
- FOMO as a suppressor of self-esteem and Snapchat intensity relationship

Abstract

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a widespread phenomenon, particularly among social media users, where individuals experience anxiety about potentially missing out on rewarding experiences with others. FOMO has been commonly associated with heightened vigilance towards digital devices. The unique features offered by different social media platforms, such as Snapchat, can exacerbate feelings of FOMO. Using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework, this study aims to further our understanding of psychological variables, such as self-esteem, social comparison, and life satisfaction, as predictors of FOMO. The sample comprised 183 Snapchat users who completed an online survey. Regression analyses showed that self-esteem and satisfaction with life (SWL) had a negative relationship with FOMO, while social comparison was positively related to FOMO. At first glance, self-esteem was not related to Snapchat intensity, but it was uncovered that FOMO was suppressing the relationship. These results provide valuable insight on precursors to FOMO-related distress. This study also sheds light on psychological variables that can serve as a barrier to some common social media stressors like FOMO. These findings can be incorporated into digital well-being initiatives and online mental health resources.

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1. Introduction

Social media is no longer a pastime—it has quickly become the beating heart of modern life. Social media is a great avenue to build, maintain and expand social relationships as well as learn new information about the world (Dempsey et al., 2019). Social media users can express themselves online in a multitude of ways, from sharing pictures or videos to engaging with others' posts or even describing one's feelings in the form of a written post. Various social media platforms (SMPs hereafter) offer unique ways for users to communicate with their followers. For instance, Instagram is primarily a photo and video sharing platform, whereas Snapchat emphasizes real-time and ephemeral communication in the form of photos or videos. In the past two decades, many different SMPs have emerged, catering to users with niche features.

The extensive use of SMPs has attracted the attention of several scholars from different fields to investigate the impact of these apps on their users. On one hand, some scholars have revealed the positive effects of SMPs (Marciano et al., 2024), while others have uncovered a "dark side" (Hattingh et al., 2022). Studies in the past have noted a relationship between social media usage and depression (Huang, 2017), loneliness (Hunt et al., 2018; Shensa et al., 2018), and anxiety (Shensa et al., 2018). Users are also constantly vigilant on social media to satiate an underlying anxiety that they are missing out on fun activities that others in their network are engaging in (Roberts & David, 2019). This is commonly known as fear of missing out or FOMO. There is a burgeoning line of research that explores the relationship between popular SMPs like Facebook and FOMO. However, there is a lacuna of research that addresses this relationship with the popular SMP Snapchat (Hattingh et al., 2022).

With approximately 635 million active monthly users, Snapchat is a juggernaut in its own right (Statista, 2023). Snapchat is widely popular among younger demographics, with the majority of its users falling within the 13-24 age range (IncRev, 2025). Snapchat offers distinctive features such as disappearing messages and real-time geolocation of friends that increase digital vigilance among users, in turn exacerbating or satiating feelings of FOMO among its user base (Vanherle et al., 2023).

Guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study investigates how fundamental psychological needs—particularly autonomy and relatedness, may influence individuals' susceptibility to FOMO, which in turn may drive more intense engagement with Snapchat. Snapchat is a rather unique SMP that offers users features to feel real-time connections with their friends, yet it has rather been understudied. By incorporating psychosocial variables such as self-esteem, social comparison trait, and life satisfaction, the present study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying Snapchat use. The study employs a quantitative survey design to test the hypotheses using regression analyses. Anticipated contributions lie in clarifying the psychological antecedents and consequences of FOMO. Further, this study will strengthen our understanding of FOMO as a driver of Snapchat usage.

1.1. Understanding Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of missing out, or "as the kids call it these days", FOMO, is defined as "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013). Feelings of FOMO is characterized by a compulsive need to stay connected with others by the usage of digital media (Roberts & David, 2019). FOMO is quite prevalent in today's society, with approximately 66% of people admitting to experiencing FOMO at some point in their lives (Huguenel, 2017; Zhang et al., 2021).

FOMO typically evokes a host of negative emotions ranging from fear, loss, depression to mostly anxiety (Elhai et al., 2016; Przybylski et al., 2013). With anxiety at the top of the helm, individuals experiencing FOMO typically worry about missing important information, activities, and experiences (Zhang et al., 2021). Zhang and colleagues (2021) noted that individuals also fear the loss of potentially positive experiences or fear being left out of such experiences. Experiencing FOMO entails two reactions: (1) perception of missing out; and (2) engaging in compulsive behaviors to reduce negative feelings and maintain social connections (Gupta & Sharma, 2021).

Early understanding of FOMO is rooted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is a psychological framework that aims to explain human motivations. This theory states that motivations are driven by three needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is described as the need to feel that one has agency over their behavior. Competence is one's belief about their capability to achieve the desired outcomes. Lastly, relatedness is the need to feel connected to others (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT posits that when the aforementioned needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, meaning they engage in activities for their inherent interest or enjoyment. When these needs remain unmet, motivation tends

to become extrinsically driven (e.g., by rewards, punishments, or even social approval), often leading to lower engagement, reduced well-being, or even negative affect such as anxiety (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

SDT is central to understanding FOMO. Per SDT, relatedness is an essential need that drives motivation. If the relatedness need is not met, individuals may experience extrinsic motivation for that specific need to be fulfilled, which can have negative consequences in turn. Feelings of anxiety that occur in conjunction with FOMO could be one of the negative consequences of unmet relatedness needs. Furthermore, FOMO is also closely tied to problematic attachment to social media, which seeks to alleviate the uncomfortable feeling of not being connected to others (Dempsey et al., 2019).

1.2. FOMO and Snapchat Intensity

Snapchat was first launched in 2011. Snapchat has introduced its users to a purely visual way of communication, where users exchange snaps (images, short videos or written messages) as the primary way of communication. Some of the features of Snapchat include: snapping pictures or short videos, applying filters (like cat face) to images or videos, and locating friends via the Snap Map feature. Typically, a sender sends a snap to a receiver, or they can post a snap to their story, which can be viewed by all of their followers. While it is fairly common to follow a person on Instagram or TikTok that the user in question does not know personally or has never met, Snapchat users typically use Snapchat to stay in contact with friends that they are acquainted with in real life (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). This makes Snapchat unique from other popular SMPs because the user's community on Snapchat is predominantly individuals with whom they usually interact in real life.

Snapchat emphasizes real-time communication with others, unlike its social media counterparts, such as Facebook and Instagram. Snapchat prioritizes direct and private interactions with others, which is contrary to other SMP giants like Instagram that thrive on sharing information with the masses. The direct message exchange format of this SMP also influences perceptions of social presence and human connection (Pittman & Reich, 2016).

The Snap Map feature, which allows friends to geolocate one another in real-time, adds another layer of uniqueness to Snapchat. When using this feature, a Snapchat user can monitor the location of their friend at the current time. At the time of writing, no other SMP had a comparable feature available to users. Bitz (2024) noted that individuals who used the Snap Map feature to monitor their friends' whereabouts were more likely to experience higher FOMO. This suggests that real-time visibility into others' social activities may intensify users' feelings of exclusion and amplify the compulsive need to stay socially connected.

Another notable feature of Snapchat is that a snap is available for a short time before it becomes inaccessible to recipients, making it unique in the world of social media. Once a snap is opened by the recipient, they are unable to store the snap on their device. If a screenshot was taken, the sender of the snap is notified about the action. This distinctive feature lends to an immediacy effect, where recipients feel a sense of urgency to access the snap (Grieve, 2017). Besides the immediacy effect, users may also perceive that the events portrayed in the snap are happening in real time, which can lead to potential FOMO.

Snapchat users may feel excluded when they see their friends sharing pictures or videos without them present. This can lead to individuals experiencing FOMO being more vigilant towards their digital devices to monitor notifications. Past literature suggests that FOMO is positively correlated with social media usage, particularly in instances of excessive social media use to keep track of others, new information, or events (Buglass et al., 2017). Using SDT, we can assert that not being present during one's friend's social outing can potentially undermine an individual's social relatedness need, which is a fundamental aspect of the need to belong. Furthermore, autonomy needs are also threatened when experiencing FOMO, as individuals feel helpless and lose control of the social situation (Przybylski et al., 2013). This can lead to hypervigilance and increased social media usage. Negative emotions stemming from these unmet needs can not only fuel FOMO but also lead to increased Snapchat usage to avoid any social exclusion or to stay "in the loop."

Keeping prior literature in mind, while progressing our understanding about Snapchat's relationship with FOMO, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: FOMO will predict Snapchat intensity.

1.3. FOMO and Social Comparison

Social comparison trait is one's tendency to compare oneself with others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Individuals who have a high social comparison trait are more likely to compare themselves with others than individuals with a low social comparison trait (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Individuals can engage in upward or downward social comparison. When individuals compare themselves to someone who is seen as superior,

they are involved in an upward social comparison. On the other hand, downward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with someone who is perceived as inferior to them in a particular aspect (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007)

Researchers have noted that increased frequency of social comparison (especially upward social comparison) often results in adverse outcomes such as negative affect like anger, depression, and anxiety (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). It is not uncommon for social media users to compare themselves to the posts (or persons) on social media (Vogel et al., 2015). Comparisons are further inflated on SMPs like Snapchat, where users can use filters to enhance their physical features or capture a short video highlighting the best part of a social event (Eshiet, 2020). In fact, Snapchat is an ideal platform for social comparison due to the influx of perceived real-time events. Individuals with high social comparison trait are more likely to experience FOMO when exposed to others' activities on SMPs like Snapchat, leading to feelings of inadequacy, exclusion, and compulsive online engagement (Reer et al., 2019). From the perspective of SDT, this pattern reflects the frustration of basic needs—especially competence, autonomy, and relatedness—and shifts motivation away from intrinsic goals. The adverse effects of social comparison will be apparent, mainly if the recipient of the snap is engaged in a mundane activity at the time.

To validate these assumptions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social comparison trait will positively predict FOMO

1.4. FOMO and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an integral part of an individual's existence. In 1965, Rosenberg defined self-esteem as one's appraisal of their own worth. The relationship between self-esteem and social comparison has been frequently studied; both social comparison and self-esteem are tied to self-evaluation (Vogel et al., 2014). Much like social comparison, individuals with lower self-esteem may experience negative affect. Prior studies have noted that low self-esteem is related to feelings of helplessness, greater social anxiety, and fear of being excluded (de Jong et al., 2012). This fear of being excluded can be the basis of FOMO (Abel et al, 2016).

Scholars who have examined the relationship between self-esteem and FOMO have found overwhelming support for this connection. FOMO has been seen to have a negative correlation with self-esteem (Burglass et al., 2017). This was replicated by Uram and colleagues (2022), who noted a large effect size of lower self-esteem on FOMO in social media users. Keeping prior research in mind, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Higher self-esteem will negatively predict FOMO

In the 21st century, social media provides a strong framework for self-evaluation. One might evaluate oneself based on what they see on SMPs (Faelens et al., 2021). A vast body of literature supports an inverse relationship between social media usage and self-esteem. For example, Facebook as well as Twitter use is linked to lower self-esteem (Errasti & Villadangos, 2017). Similarly, a systematic review found a negative relationship between Instagram usage and self-esteem (Faelens et al., 2021).

While other SMPs have plenty of studies that support their inverse relationship with self-esteem, the jury is still out when it comes to Snapchat usage. On the one hand, Musarrat and colleagues (2022) state that self-esteem and Snapchat usage have a significant inverse relationship; however, Manap et al. (2023) were unable to establish a strong connection between the two. The following hypothesis aims to reconcile conflicting perspectives within the current body of literature:

H4: Higher self-esteem will negatively predict Snapchat intensity.

1.5. FOMO and Satisfaction with Life

Satisfaction with life (SWL) is an evaluation of one's life quality based on a certain criterion that is important to the individual (Shin & Johnson, 1978). This is primarily a cognitive judgmental process about someone's own present state of affairs (Diener et al., 1985). While SWL can influence many aspects of one's life, it can specifically impact feelings of FOMO (Uram et al., 2022). Simply put, individuals who are satisfied with their life are less likely to feel anxious about anticipating that others are having more rewarding experiences (FOMO). As previously stated, individuals with FOMO often compare themselves with others and believe that others have a more rewarding life. This can be viewed as a "me" versus "others" mentality in the context of experiences (Uram et al., 2022, p. 227). Przybylski and colleagues (2013) noted that individuals who have lower social media usage report lower levels of FOMO and higher levels of SWL.

The following hypothesis will test this assumption:

H5: Higher satisfaction with life will negatively predict FOMO.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model illustrating the relationships among the variables detailed in the prior sections. This model highlights key relationships proposed between FOMO, social comparison, self-esteem, SWL, and Snapchat intensity.

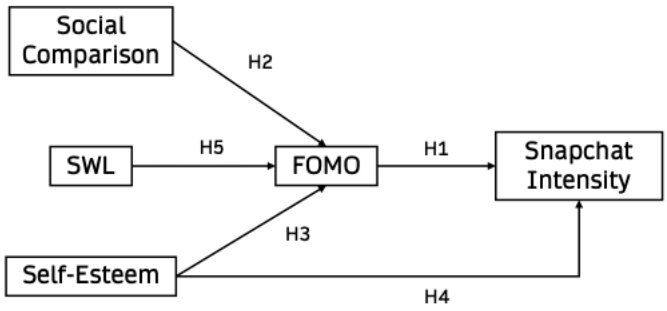

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The present study was conducted with human subjects after obtaining approval from Northeastern University's (Boston, MA) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (# 19-04-07). The study followed the guidelines provided by the IRB. Once approval was granted, the study was advertised in the Amazon MTurk worker community to recruit potential participants. Participants were informed that they would receive $0.50 upon completing the survey. The survey was designed to take no more than five minutes, making the compensation comparable to the federal minimum wage in the United States. Inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18 years old and active social media users. After clicking the study link, participants viewed an information sheet and could consent to participate. After data cleaning, the final sample included 184 participants.

Snapchat's user base is generally younger than that of other social media platforms. It primarily attracts users aged 13 to 24, with the next largest age group being 25 to 34 years old (IncRev, 2025). For ethical reasons, minors under the age of 18 were excluded from participation. Considering Snapchat's broader age range, the average age of 28.03 years (SD = 6.16) is appropriate for this study.

Most participants were male (56.4%, n = 110), 36.9% identified as female (n = 72), and two participants (1%) identified as "other." The majority reported being single (51.8%), while 36.4% were married. A few participants reported being widowed (.5%), divorced (2.1%), or separated (2.6%).

Participants also reported their Snapchat usage. On average, they spent 69.6 minutes per day on Snapchat and logged in approximately 6.1 times daily.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

FOMO was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Przybylski and colleagues (2013). Responses were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not true about me" to "absolutely true about me". "I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me" is an example item of this scale. The reliability of this scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha (α = .94).

2.2.2. Snapchat Intensity

Snapchat use was measured by asking participants eight questions. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) initially measured the extent of Facebook use using a similar approach. The scale was modified to measure Snapchat intensity. "Snapchat is part of my everyday activity" and "I am proud to tell people I'm on Snapchat" are examples of items used in this scale. Participants responded using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Participants were also asked to note how many times a day they log on to Snapchat and how many minutes a day they spend on the app. The reliability for the composite variable is strong (α = .89).

2.2.3. Social Comparison

In order to measure social comparison, the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) was employed (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The 11-item scale used a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree to measure the responses. An example item is "I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared to others do things." Cronbach's alpha was acceptable (.73).

2.2.4. Self-Esteem

This was measured using Rosenberg's 10-item scale (1965). It was 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An example item is "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." For this study, Cronbach's alpha was acceptable at .72.

2.2.5. Satisfaction with Life

A modified version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure overall life satisfaction among participants for this study. This measure uses 5 items, and participants' responses were recorded using a 7-point Likert-type scale from extremely satisfied to highly dissatisfied. "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" and "How satisfied are you with your personal relationships?" are examples of scale items. The scale is deemed reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29). Prior to analysis, the dataset was thoroughly cleaned to ensure accuracy and consistency. Cases with excessive missing data were removed. Averaged composite variables were constructed for all key constructs by averaging the items corresponding to each scale. Items were reverse-coded where necessary to maintain directional consistency. To assess the internal consistency of these multi-item measures, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each scale. Next, the means and standard deviation of the aforementioned variables were computed, along with their skewness and kurtosis. The skewness of the variables ranged between -1 and 1, except for Snapchat intensity (skewness = -1.12, SE = 0.18), indicating a symmetric distribution. Although not in ideal parameters, Snapchat intensity also had an acceptable skewness considering the size of the data. Similarly, the case was with kurtosis, where all variables were considered normally distributed (between -2 and 2). Residuals were tested with each regression analysis by assessing the histogram, normal P–P plot, and scatterplot of standardized residuals versus predicted values. Each result was approximately normally distributed and demonstrated homoscedasticity.

3. Results

Table 1 describes the means, standard deviations, correlations, skewness, and kurtosis of five key variables tested in this study. SPSS was used to conduct bivariate Pearson Correlations. Results indicate that most of the variables are correlated with one another. However, SWL was significantly correlated with only two of the four other variables. To test the normality of the data, kurtosis and skewness were computed using the descriptive statistics function. Histograms and Q-Q plots were also visually inspected to determine normality.

H1 proposed that FOMO will predict Snapchat intensity. Assumption checks were performed prior to interpretation. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as VIF was 1.00 and Tolerance was 1.00, indicating no shared variance between predictors. This hypothesis was supported using linear regression [β = .57, $t_{(1,182)}$ = 9.29, p < .001]. FOMO explained 32% of the variance in Snapchat intensity [$F_{(1,182)}$ = 86.35, p < .001, *adjusted* R^2 = .32]. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.93.

Next, H2 predicted that social comparison would predict FOMO. Linear regression was used to analyze this relationship, and H2 was supported [β = .57, $t_{(1,182)}$ = 9.27, p < .001]. Specifically, social comparison explained 32.1% of the variance in FOMO [$F_{(1,182)}$ = 85.89, p < .001, *adjusted* R^2 = .31]. Assumption testing indicated no serious violations. Residuals were normally distributed and homoscedastic, and multicollinearity was not a concern (VIF = 1.00, Tolerance = 1.00). Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.0, suggesting no autocorrelation in the residuals.

Linear regression was used to test if self-esteem will negatively predict FOMO (H3). VIF (1.00) and Tolerance (1.00) were acceptable for this hypothesis as well. Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.1, indicating independence of residuals. After analysis, this hypothesis (H3) was supported [β = -.46, $t_{(182)}$ = -6.95 p < .001]. Self-esteem explained 20.5% of the variance in FOMO [$F_{(1,182)}$ = 48.30, *adjusted* R^2 = .21, p < .001], indicating that individuals with higher self-esteem reported lower FOMO.

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics of key variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1	Social Comparison	--				
2	FOMO	.57**	--			
3	Snapchat Intensity	.58**	.58**	--		
4	Life Satisfaction	-.11	-.26**	.04	--	
5	Self-Esteem	-.24**	-.46**	-.11	.39**	--
	M	4.88	4.77	5.16	4.33	4.3
	SD	.75	1.43	1.21	1.75	.85
	Skewness (SE)	-.91 (.18)	-.81 (.18)	-1.13 (.18)	-.25 (.18)	.72 (.18)
	Kurtosis (SE)	1.11 (.36)	-.02 (.36)	1.59 (.36)	-1.29 (.35)	2.0 (.36)

H4 predicted the negative relationship between self-esteem and Snapchat intensity. This hypothesis was not supported [$F_{(1,182)}$ = 2.35, p = n.s.]. Due to this surprising finding (H4), an ad-hoc mediation analysis was conducted to understand better the nuanced relationship between self-esteem, FOMO, and Snapchat intensity. Using PROCESS Model 4 in SPSS, a mediation analysis was conducted. Self-esteem was entered as the independent variable, Snapchat intensity as the dependent variable, and FOMO as the mediator. Results indicated that self-esteem significantly predicted FOMO, [b = −0.77, SE = 0.11, $t_{(182)}$ = −6.95, p < .001, *95% CI* (−0.99, −0.55)], such that individuals with lower self-esteem reported higher FOMO. In turn, FOMO significantly predicted Snapchat intensity, [b = 0.55, SE = 0.06, $t_{(181)}$ = 9.67, p < .001, *95% CI* (0.44, 0.67)].

The indirect effect of self-esteem on Snapchat intensity via FOMO as a mediator was significant [b = −0.43, 95% bootstrap CI (−0.74, −0.21)], indicating that lower self-esteem was associated with greater FOMO, which in turn predicted more intense Snapchat use. Interestingly, the total effect of self-esteem on Snapchat intensity was not significant [b = −0.16, SE = 0.11, $t_{(182)}$ = −1.53, p = .127, 95% CI (−0.37, 0.05)]. However, the direct effect of self-esteem on Snapchat intensity while controlling for FOMO was positive and significant [b = 0.27, SE = 0.10, $t_{(181)}$ = 2.76, p = .006, 95% CI (0.08, 0.45)]. This indicates a suppression effect by FOMO on self-esteem and Snapchat intensity.

The last hypothesis posited that SWL will negatively predict FOMO (H5). Assumption testing indicated no serious violations. Assumption testing revealed no serious violations (VIF = 1.00, Tolerance = 1.00). Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.1, suggesting no autocorrelation in the residuals. This hypothesis was supported (β = -.26, $t_{(182)}$ = -3.17, p < .001). Specifically, SWL explained 6.2% of the variance in FOMO [$F_{(1, 182)}$ = 13.01, *adjusted* R^2 = .06, p < .001]. Figure 2 illustrates the tested conceptual model, showing the significant relationships between FOMO, social comparison, self-esteem, SWL, and Snapchat intensity. Non-significant relationships are not depicted in this conceptual model.

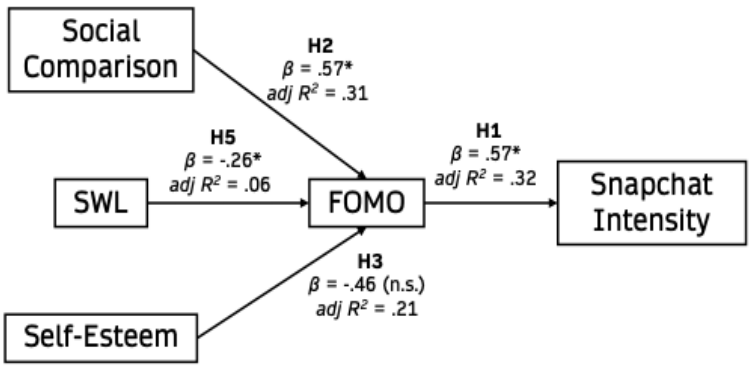

Figure 2. Conceptual model with standardized coefficients and adjusted R^2.

Notes: *p < .001, n.s. non-significant

4. Discussion

With the widespread proliferation of social media, both scholars and practitioners have expressed growing concern regarding its potential adverse effects (Hattingh et al., 2022). One such consequence is the experience

of FOMO. The present study examined FOMO by identifying its psychological antecedents. Specifically, it was uncovered that an increased social comparison trait has a positive relationship with FOMO. Next, we also found an inverse relationship between self-esteem and FOMO, indicating that individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to experience higher FOMO. SWL was a negative predictor of FOMO, whereby the lower the SWL, the higher the FOMO.

Although Snapchat is one of the largest SMPs, it remains relatively understudied. Its distinct features, such as private messaging, real-time sharing, and geolocating, set it apart from other platforms. Given these unique affordances, precursors of Snapchat intensity were investigated in relation to FOMO. Increased FOMO was associated with heightened Snapchat usage intensity. Surprisingly, self-esteem was not a negative predictor of Snapchat intensity, but FOMO emerged as the suppressor variable in that relationship after an ad-hoc mediation analysis. These findings offer valuable insights into the nuanced relationships between these variables, shedding light on the complex psychological mechanisms underlying individuals' experiences in the digital age.

Social media is littered with images and videos of people indulging in lavish purchases or fun activities. This inevitably leads to users comparing themselves with other social media users. In a sense, people are consistently trying to "keep up with the Joneses," but in this case, social media users often are trying to keep up with people they have never seen or met, which can be an unattainable goal. Prior studies have noted that high social comparison is linked to negative outcomes, including negative affect such as depression and envy, while on SMPs (Park & Baek, 2018). Przybylski and colleagues (2013) established that FOMO encompasses feelings of envy and anxiety, which can suggest a level of comorbidity between the social comparison trait and FOMO in the context of social media. In the present study, it was found that increased social comparison led to heightened FOMO—indicating that individuals with a higher social comparison trait might feel elevated levels of FOMO, which is accompanied by complex negative emotions, such as envy and anxiety. These findings suggest that individuals with certain personality traits, in this case, the social comparison trait, are more vulnerable to negative consequences on SMPs.

In this day and age, individuals often fear that they have missed out on key information or experiences, a phenomenon referred to as FOMO in this study. This can result in checking their SMPs more frequently. Ironically, frequent use of social media can lead individuals to miss out on participating in current offline activities. Even during the times that individuals are surrounded by people and experiencing life, some social media users are known to disconnect from "real" experiences in lieu of "augmented" ones. Shensa and colleagues (2020) found that about 24% of people have missed out on key moments in their lives due to being invested in posting or scrolling through social media. Arguably, missing out on key events in real life can lead to discomfort similar to FOMO. This implies that there can be a cyclical relationship between heightened FOMO and social media usage.

These findings, coupled with the revelation that FOMO also predicted Snapchat intensity, have grave implications for how digital habits reinforce psychological distress. Specifically, this might reflect a feedback loop where the social comparison trait triggers more FOMO, which in turn increases Snapchat usage, leading to further social comparisons and potentially creating a cognitive-affective spiral. Future researchers could employ a longitudinal design to examine whether experiencing FOMO predicts increased Snapchat use over time, and whether this relationship is moderated or mediated by individual differences such as social comparison trait.

One of the most interesting findings of this study comes from a surprising lack of support for hypothesis 4. Initial analysis showed that self-esteem did not predict Snapchat intensity. Interestingly, self-esteem had a significant inverse relationship with FOMO, and FOMO exhibited a significant positive relationship with Snapchat intensity. A mediation analysis was conducted to examine the potential full mediation of self-esteem on Snapchat intensity through FOMO. The analysis revealed that FOMO suppressed the underlying relationship between self-esteem and Snapchat usage. This illustrates the true complexity of these relationships. At first glance, it may seem that lower self-esteem does not predict increased Snapchat use. However, the suppression effect suggests that individuals with both high and low self-esteem may use Snapchat more heavily. While users with low self-esteem might use Snapchat more to satisfy FOMO, those with higher self-esteem could use it for other reasons—such as staying connected, expressing themselves, or getting information on current events. This important finding helps us better understand the nuanced ways that "protective" psychological variables like self-esteem can influence social media behavior, where lower self-esteem may lead to negative effects, while higher self-esteem might promote more positive and productive use.

The present study also offers several reassuring insights. While much of the discourse around social media focuses on its potential harms, these findings highlight the buffering effects of positive psychological

traits against those adverse effects, especially in the experience of FOMO. Individuals who reported higher overall SWL tended to experience significantly lower levels of FOMO. Similarly, participants with higher self-esteem also reported reduced FOMO scores. These results underscore the value of subjective well-being and stable self-worth as psychological resources that help individuals navigate social media environments without succumbing to the negative emotions that often accompany constant exposure to others' curated lives.

Anchored in SDT, these findings can be interpreted as evidence that when individuals' basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are being met, they are less likely to feel negative affect when perceiving social exclusion. These findings extend our understanding of FOMO by suggesting that internal contentment may also play a key role in diminishing the effects of FOMO. This contentment, reflected in high SWL and self-esteem, may stem from the fulfillment of other basic needs, such as feeling autonomous and competent in one's own life.

5.1. Practical implications

This study has several practical implications as well. Problematic social media usage is on the rise. Users are also known to spend countless hours on social media "doom scrolling" (i.e. mindlessly scrolling through posts that SMP algorithms have generated). Mental health practitioners, as well as social media users alike, have recognized the increasing dependence on social media (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). However, it is essential to distinguish individual differences in the likelihood of problematic social media usage. The findings provide an important starting point for practitioners to understand precursors of problematic social media usage. While the present study did not directly study ways to alleviate problematic social media usage or social media addiction, we know that increased self-esteem and higher SWL can act as a buffer for the adverse effects of social media, such as FOMO. Practitioners working with distressed individuals can suggest that individuals step away from their digital habits and focus on other aspects that can enhance their social well-being and self-esteem. To reduce social media-related FOMO, users can schedule or time their social media use. Most popular cellphone operating systems allow users to set a time limit on chosen apps. Therefore, users can spend only a designated amount of time on social media and avoid doom scrolling for hours.

Moreover, we can allude to a vicious cycle of social comparison, FOMO, and heightened social media usage. Those predisposed to social comparison should exercise caution, as increased social media usage can fuel social comparison, leading to FOMO. Drawing from SDT, social media users who experience heightened FOMO (which is tied to relatedness) should be encouraged to set a self-chosen motivation for accessing social media (e.g., "I want to check on my friends" or "I want to share a cool picture that I just took"). After the chosen goal is attained, users should be encouraged to log off. In doing so, users will satisfy autonomy needs (the need to feel agency over their own behavior). This strategy reframes social media use as goal-directed and self-determined, reducing the likelihood of passive, comparison-driven engagement that fuels FOMO.

5.2. Limitations and directions for future research

The present study has its own set of limitations. Although it yielded many interesting findings, the analysis was limited in rigor. Because the sample size was small, conducting advanced statistical analyses like structural equation modeling (SEM) was not advisable. Doing so could have provided a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between variables. Future research should be mindful of sample size, especially when exploring the connection between psychological antecedents and FOMO. It is also important to note that the sample was obtained from MTurk. While more diverse than typical convenience samples, it does not fully represent the general population. Additionally, the study did not collect extensive demographic data. Basic demographics such as age and gender were recorded, but including other factors like income, race/ethnicity, and educational background would have been helpful. The lack of these variables limits our ability to assess sampling biases and to investigate demographic moderators. Future studies should include these variables and explore whether demographic factors influence the relationships among social comparison, FOMO, and Snapchat usage intensity. Lastly, this was a one-time survey, which couldn't capture participants' feelings while engaging with Snapchat. Researchers should design experiments that measure participants' reactions to Snapchat stimuli in real-time.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the results provide a valuable starting point for furthering our understanding of the inner workings of FOMO, particularly in the context of Snapchat. While FOMO research is robust, literature is still lacking in understanding individual differences that can lead to heightened FOMO, and the present study aims to bridge the lacuna. By addressing the underlying psychological factors that serve as a barrier to FOMO, individuals can develop healthier relationships with SMPs, encouraging mindful and balanced usage.

Statement of Researcher

Researchers' contribution rate statement:

Deya Roy: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal data analysis, writing -original draft preparation, writing - review & editing, data curation.

Conflict statement:

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement:

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. However, the data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Ethical Considerations:

This research was approved by Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (19-04-07). All procedures followed were by the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board on human experimentation. The IRB follows Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (often referred to as the Belmont Report). Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

Author Biography

Dr. Deya Roy is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Media Studies at California State University, San Marcos. Her research focuses on the effects of new media on individuals, with a particular interest in social media. She examines how digital platforms shape human behavior, identity, and interpersonal relationships in contemporary society. Specifically, her work explores how psychological variables—such as motivation, emotion, and self-concept—influence communication choices and patterns of media use. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative methods, Dr. Roy seeks to understand the dynamic interactions between users and media technologies in everyday life. Her scholarship contributes to conversations around media psychology, digital well-being, and the ethical use of emerging technologies.

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