

# Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a Mediator of Anxiety on Social Media Fatigue in Early Adulthood

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**Abstract.** Several psychological issues are associated with excessive use of social media, including anxiety, Social Media Fatigue, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Therefore, this research aimed to examine the mediating role of FOMO between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue. The quantitative analysis involved 224 early adulthood individuals as participants, using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Social Media Fatigue, and FOMO Scales as instruments. The path analysis result showed that FOMO acted as a mediator between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue. The mediation was partial since anxiety directly influenced Social Media Fatigue with FOMO acting as a mediator. Future research should also be conducted to explore other stronger mediating variables between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue.

**Keywords:** Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), anxiety, social media fatigue, early adulthood

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## Introduction

The rapid development of technology and information is transforming the way people connect with others across long distances, providing unprecedented levels of convenience. According to Syaipudin (2020), advanced communication technology allows individuals to interact and exchange information without time and place limitations. Based on the Internet Indonesia Profile, 89.15% of people use the internet every day to access social media, and 73.86% communicate through online messaging (Association of Internet Service Providers, 2022). Additionally, Azka et al. (2018) found that the most frequent activity among students when using gadgets is accessing social media.

The highest users of social media are in the age group of 25-34 years (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022). These data indicate that early adulthood individuals are the most active social media users, with the most frequently used platforms of YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022). Aside from being a means of communication, social media serves as a platform for early adulthood individuals to construct and refine their self-concept. It enables them to participate in particular communities

that cater to their shared hobbies, facilitating the expansion of social connections (Putra & Ariana, 2022).

Excessive use of social media can lead to psychological fatigue due to perceived cognitive overload and an inability to process every piece of information received (Argaheni, 2020). The various forms of information can have an impact on a psychological state. Furthermore, the abundance of sites and content accessed can make someone feel tired and angry, experience decreased motivation, and lose interest in activities.

Social Media Fatigue is the tendency of individuals to distance themselves from social media due to excessive content consumption (Bright et al., 2015). It is also associated with concerns about privacy among users, which can originate from various sources, such as social and technological factors. Anxiety is a prominent contributing factor to the phenomenon of Social Media Fatigue. The presence prompts individuals to engage in frequent social media usage, resulting in psychological exhaustion caused by an influx of information. According to Rahardjo et al. (2020), anxiety can emerge when individuals are faced with the task of simultaneously processing multiple

pieces of information. This leads to cognitive overload, impeding the ability to effectively process an excessive amount of information that surpasses their cognitive capacity.

Anxiety arises from a reaction to uncertain situations (Nugrahati et al., 2018). The most common form in the general population is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (Sapra et al., 2020). Spielberger and Reheiser (2009) defined the concept as comprising state and trait anxiety. State anxiety denotes transient sensations of concern and tension after the occurrence of specific events or the perception of menacing stimuli. This form of anxiety is fleeting, manifesting solely in response to influential stimuli. Conversely, trait anxiety encompasses a lasting sense of unease that forms an inherent component of an individual's personality. According to Herwanto and Febyani (2015), anxiety experienced when accessing social media falls within the category of state anxiety. It arises when individuals receive stimuli in the form of a large amount of information from social media.

Excessive use of social media triggers the emergence of fatigue (Dhir et al., 2019). Fatigue experienced due to excessive information consumption and processing affects cognitive abilities. This condition leads to anxiety and worries. Christina et al. (2019) explained that the majority of individuals who access social media for a minimum of two hours daily are prone to experiencing anxiety. Individuals experiencing anxiety often exhibit a proclivity for seeking extensive information to comprehend their condition. However, the excessive utilization of social media by anxious individuals engenders psychological fatigue owing to the unfiltered nature of the information acquired.

Besides anxiety, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is related to fatigue experienced when individuals excessively engage with social media. FOMO is characterized by feelings of loss, anxiety, and the inability to be part of enjoyable events (Przybylski et al., 2013). Oberst et al. (2017) showed that FOMO has negative impacts on physiological well-being and can lead to accessing social media more frequently.

FOMO is a psychological phenomenon characterized by the desire to emulate the actions of people and the belief that others are experiencing more exciting and fulfilling events than oneself. This feeling is rooted in uncontrolled thoughts and emotions, leading individuals to constantly seek and consume information on social media to stay updated with the lifestyle of people. Extensive research has indicated that FOMO can act as a mediator, exacerbating negative psychological conditions such as social anxiety, problematic social media use, and the habit of "phubbing" among social media users (Dempsey, 2019; Fang et al., 2020).

The current research takes a unique perspective, suggesting that the anxious state experienced during social media use is the driving force behind the development of FOMO regarding exciting events on social media. This constant cycle of seeking validation and engagement on social platforms ultimately leads to continuous social media use with cognitive and emotional fatigue. This fatigue can manifest into more severe mental health issues when left unchecked. Moreover, Elhai et al. (2020) reported that FOMO can mediate the relationship between anxiety and excessive gadget use, showcasing the close link between FOMO and contemporary communication through the internet. To enrich the understanding of FOMO as a mediator with other variables, this research aims to delve deeper into its role. Even though Elhai et al. (2020) focused on Chinese university students, the present research selected young adult participants. This choice is supported by previous research showing that young adults are the most active age group in utilizing social media (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022; Fauzia et al., 2019; Putra & Ariana, 2022). The research delves into the mediating role of FOMO, seeking to examine the complex interplay between these variables in the context of social media use and its impact on mental well-being.

## Methods

This quantitative research was conducted to determine the direct and indirect effects of anxiety and FOMO on Social Media Fatigue. The technique used purposive sampling, involving selecting a sample with homogeneous data to gain an in-depth understanding of a group of participants (Campbell et al., 2020). The research included 224 young adult participants between the ages of 18 and 30 who are actively accessing social media daily.

The research utilized Anxiety, Social Media Fatigue, and FOMO Scales without dimensions or aspects. Anxiety variable used the GAD scale (GAD-7) developed by Spitzer et al. (2006). The GAD-7 scale consisted of 7 items with four response options, namely not at all sure (0), several days (1), more than half the days (2), and nearly every day (3). The items included "Feeling worried about many things" and "Finding it hard to relax." The GAD-7 scale had been adapted into Indonesian with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .864 (Rahardjo et al., 2020).

Social Media Fatigue variable used Social Media Fatigue Scale developed by Bright et al. (2015) and adapted to Indonesian by Rahardjo et al. (2020). The scale consisted of 5 items, such as "I feel overwhelmed with too much information when searching for something on social media" and "The amount of information on social media makes me feel tense and uncomfortable." Each item had five response options,

including strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 8.

FOMO variable used the scale developed by Wegmann et al. (2017) and adapted into Indonesian by Risdyanti et al. (2019). Furthermore, the scale consisted of 12 items with response options ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' on a Likert scale. The items included "When I miss planned gatherings, it bothers me" and "I'm afraid of missing out on information on my social media." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 87.

The participants' consent was obtained through a Google Form. The form explained that all information provided was used for research purposes, and potential participants decided to agree when they consented to participate. During data collection, participants filled out an online questionnaire through Google Forms consisting of 24 items based on their conditions. Participants were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and all data and information collected were used solely for research purposes.

The data analysis was utilized to determine the direct or indirect effects of the research variables using the JASP 0.16.4 program.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Data*

Characteristics	Total	%
Gender		
Female	180	80.4
Male	44	19.6
Age (Mean=22.06)		
18-23	155	69.2
24-30	69	30.8
Occupation		
Freelancer	9	4.0
Teacher	4	1.8
Housewife	5	2.2
Employee	36	16.1
College Students	135	60.3
Civil Servants	5	2.2
Students	21	9.4
Entrepreneur	9	4.0
Duration of Social Media Access		
< 1 hour	4	1.8
1-3 hours	53	23.7
4-6 hours	95	42.4
7-9 hours	38	17.0
> 9 hours	34	15.2
Social Media		
*Participants can select more than 2 social media		
Instagram	201	89.7
Twitter	160	71.4
Whatsapp	220	98.2
Telegram	87	38.8
Tiktok	26	11.6
Line	87	38.8
Facebook	39	17.4
Youtube	7	3.1

Table 1 showed a total of 224 young adult individuals (18-30 years old) who were involved in the research. It was dominated by female participants at 80.4%, and male at 19.6%. The highest age range was 18-23 years old (69.2%), with a mean age of 22.06 years. In terms of occupation, the majority of participants were students, with a total of 135 individuals (60.3%), while the smallest group consisted of 4 teachers (1.8%).

The discussion regarding the most active age group in accessing social media had been conducted. This research was consistent with Fauzia et al. (2019), where 57% were within the age range of 18-22 years. This indicated that young adults within this age range were the most numerous and active users of social media. The same research found a specific condition related to the use of Instagram, with 37% of the participants accessing the platform for more than 3 hours (Fauzia et al., 2019). Furthermore, more than half were accustomed to accessing social media for more than 4 hours daily. This observation supported the participants' need for using social media. Based on the data on the duration of access, accessing social media had become an important part of daily life, especially for young adults.

Social media offered various benefits by accessing a single platform, such as staying updated with the latest information, online shopping, and entertainment through videos. Participants accessed the platforms with attractive features. The survey showed that the highest percentage, 42.4%, actively access social media for 4-6 hours. On average, they accessed more than 2 platforms daily according to their needs. The findings align with, Andriani and Sulistyorini (2022), where 21.4% of participants access social media for more than 5 hours daily. Moreover, there is a tendency for social media usage of 57.5% with a frequency of "all the time."

Using social media for an extended duration can lead to addiction. Hou et al. (2019) indicated that the addiction negatively affected mental health. Poor mental health conditions impacted an individual's ability to build interpersonal relationships in social environment. Addicted individuals often rely on it as their primary means of improving mood. Psychological well-being was also affected when the need was not fulfilled.

Mawardah (2019) found qualitative results indicating that participants became addicted to excessive internet use because of the liberation to socialize. One of the significant impacts observed was the neglect of regular tasks or responsibilities, social isolation, and a preference for engaging in accessed social media platforms. The three most frequently accessed platforms were WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter with 220, 201, and 160 participants,

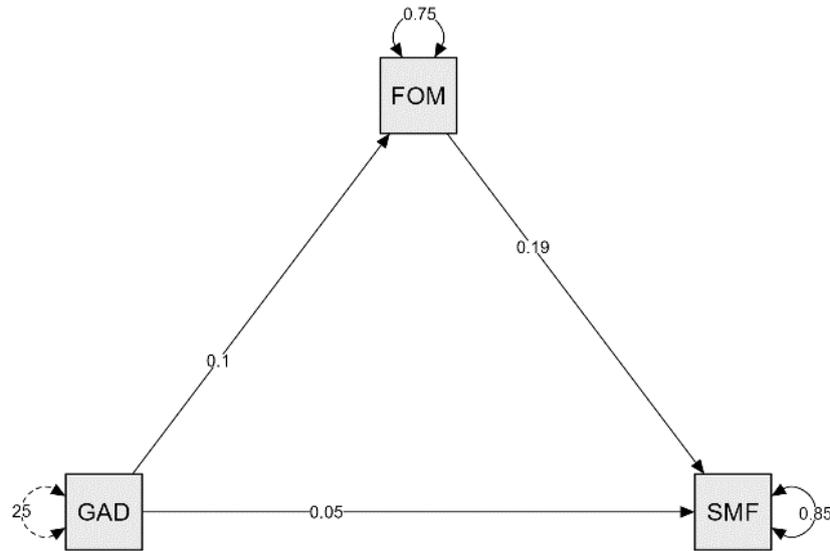


Figure 1. Analysis of anxiety mediation, FOMO, and Social Media Fatigue

Table 2  
Anxiety Mediation Analysis, FOMO, and Social Media Fatigue

Model	Variable	Estimate	P	Lower	Upper
Direct Effects	GAD→SMF	.050	<.001	.022	.077
	GAD→ FOMO	.098	<.001	.075	.120
	FOMO→SMF	.188	.008	.049	.327
Indirect Effects	GAD→ FOMO→SMF	.018	.012	.004	.033

\*SMF = Social Media Fatigue, FOMO = Fear Missing of Out, GAD = Kecemasan

respectively. The most common reasons expressed for using these platforms were for entertainment, communication, and obtaining the latest information. These findings were consistent with the survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (2022), where WhatsApp and Telegram were the most accessed applications, particularly for online chatting. The survey also showed that the majority of participants in all 34 provinces used the internet daily to access social media.

Aprilia et al. (2020) mentioned that WhatsApp was the most widely used and accessed platform. It was considered social media platform equipped with features for sending messages, photos, videos, and documents, making it easier to communicate with others over long distances. This finding aligns with the present research, where participants accessed WhatsApp more frequently due to its primary purpose of instant messaging, including the ability to update status. WhatsApp was also one of the most widely used instant messaging applications, especially in Indonesia. This promoted users of other social media platforms to use the application more often compared to others.

Table 2 shows significant p-values for the direct effects between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue (E=.050, p<.001, 95% CI= [.022, .077]). Significant values

were also found for the direct effects between anxiety and FOMO, as well as FOMO and Social Media Fatigue. In terms of indirect effects (E= .018, p<.05, 95% CI = [.004, .033]), there was a significant score for FOMO as a mediator in the correlation between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue. However, the effect size generated in the relationship was smaller (E=.018) compared to anxiety and Social Media Fatigue (E=.050). FOMO had a significant p-value as a potential mediator, and the effect was weak in influencing the relationship between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue.

These findings indicated the occurrence of partial mediation by FOMO on anxiety and Social Media Fatigue among young adults. Partial mediation occurred when there was a direct effect between the independent and dependent variables, as well as an indirect effect through the mediating variable (Cepeda-Carión et al., 2017). Partial mediation was categorized into two types, namely complementary, where the indirect and direct effects were in the same direction, and competitive, where the indirect effect is in the opposite direction (Cepeda-Carión et al., 2017). In this research, complementary mediation was observed because both the indirect and direct effects significantly pointed in the same direction.

The results were consistent with Świątek et al. (2021) that FOMO influenced the correlation between anxiety and Social Media Fatigue, both cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. Therefore, anxiety was considered to cause FOMO in social interactions, leading to fatigue associated with socializing on social media. This condition triggered FOMO on the latest information or events from online interactions, leading individuals to constantly access social media, resulting in feelings of fatigue.

Anxiety played a direct role in influencing Social Media Fatigue. Zhang et al. (2020) explained that there was a specific anxious feeling, especially emotional anxiety after spending time on social media. One of the emotions that emerged when realizing the amount of time spent was a feeling of guilt (Zhang et al., 2020). In this case, individuals became aware that many activities should have been performed but were forgotten due to excessive use of social media.

This research is supported by Shen et al. (2020), that FOMO was directly and indirectly correlated with Social Media Fatigue. As a stressor, it caused individuals to experience disruptive physical symptoms. This was because individuals with FOMO excessively accessed social media. Some examples of excessive social media usage behaviors included consuming a lot of information, replying to messages excessively, and spending time on specific platforms, resulting in mental and physical fatigue.

FOMO made individuals more compulsive in accessing social media, making them easily fatigued due to receiving excessive information (Wolniewicz et al., 2018). Bright and Logan (2018) also explained that the variable had a positive correlation with Social Media Fatigue. The constant connection to social media resulted in fatigue. Compulsive use of these platforms contributed to FOMO and ultimately led to Social Media Fatigue (Zhang et al., 2022).

A survey regarding participants' responses to fake news or hoaxes on social media was also conducted, specifically examining their emotional conditions and reactions to information. The results showed that many participants felt annoyed, disappointed, angry, and curious when encountering fake information. These feelings and responses led to continuous behavior of accessing social media to obtain accurate and reliable information.

Social Media Fatigue was caused by continuous and uncontrolled access to social media due to the desire to constantly seek new information. Furthermore, when someone received information with uncertain accuracy, there was a tendency to search for other information that reinforced their assumptions. Other psychological impacts included the emergence of negative emotions such as disappointment, anger, or frustration. This was consistent with Di Domenico et

al. (2021) that individuals need to know the credibility of the sources providing information on social media. Therefore, it was important to accurately determine the sources of information and verify the authenticity to avoid fake news.

This research had several limitations. The scales used did not have dimensions or aspects, and only contained statement items. Therefore, additional analyses, such as correlation of each aspect of the variables used should be performed. This research also focused on the characteristics of participants in early adulthood age range, and active social media users are those under 18 years old. Many individuals in the middle and older adulthood age range actively used social media. Future research should have a broader age range to better depict the mental health conditions of social media users.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, higher levels of anxiety were associated with increased Social Media Fatigue. Moreover, the variable indirectly contributed to the emergence of fatigue, supported by the role of FOMO. This was attributed to individuals with anxiety having negative thoughts and emotions, which led to psychological fatigue when using social media. Due to FOMO, individuals were obsessed and engaged in compulsive behaviors when accessing social media, and this led to psychological fatigue. Therefore, anxiety and FOMO played a role in the emergence of fatigue among social media users.

Further research should be conducted to understand the factors influencing anxiety, FOMO, and Social Media Fatigue in individuals at different stages of development. In the future, appropriate interventions are needed to help individuals cope with anxiety, FOMO, and Social Media Fatigue.

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