

# FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): A Modern Psychological Phenomenon in the Digital Era

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has become a psychological and behavioral concern in modern society, particularly among youth and health professionals exposed to social media.

**Aim:** To explore the concept, causes, psychological implications, and management strategies of FOMO, highlighting its relevance to nursing and health education.

**Methods:** A narrative review was conducted from peer-reviewed literature published between 2013–2024, retrieved from databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

**Results:** FOMO is associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, poor sleep, and overuse of social media. It negatively affects academic and professional performance and contributes to digital addiction.

**Conclusion:** Promoting digital literacy, mindfulness, and emotional awareness are key to overcoming FOMO. Integrating such interventions into nursing curricula can enhance mental well-being and professional balance.

**Keywords:** Fear of Missing Out, Social Media, Mental Health, Digital Addiction, Nursing Students, Anxiety

## INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has transformed how individuals connect, communicate, and perceive social belonging. However, this transformation has given rise to a new form of anxiety known as the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)—defined as 'a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent' (1). FOMO manifests as the compulsive desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing online, often leading to anxiety, restlessness, and emotional dissatisfaction (2). Among students and healthcare professionals, FOMO can contribute to burnout, reduced focus, and mental fatigue (3,4). The phenomenon reflects the paradox of being digitally connected yet emotionally isolated.

## METHODS

A narrative literature review approach was adopted. Studies published between 2013 and 2024 were identified using keywords: Fear of Missing Out, FOMO, social media addiction, digital well-being, and mental health. Inclusion criteria included studies focusing on FOMO's psychological and behavioral outcomes, research among students, youth, and healthcare professionals, and peer-reviewed articles in English.

### Search Strategy

Literature published between **2013 and 2024** was systematically searched using electronic databases including **PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar**. The following **keywords and Boolean operators** were used to identify relevant articles:

- "Fear of Missing Out" OR "FOMO"
- "Social media addiction"

- "Digital well-being"
- "Mental health"
- "Youth" OR "Students" OR "Healthcare professionals"

Searches were restricted to **peer-reviewed articles published in English**. References of selected articles were manually scanned to identify additional relevant studies.

### Inclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they met the following criteria:

1. Focused on **FOMO** as a primary variable or psychological construct.
2. Explored **psychological or behavioral outcomes** of FOMO (e.g., anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, digital addiction).
3. Included study populations such as **adolescents, university students, or healthcare professionals**.
4. Published in **peer-reviewed journals in English** between 2013–2024.

### Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Did not investigate FOMO or related digital behaviors.
2. Were non-peer-reviewed materials, editorials, conference abstracts, or dissertations.
3. Focused solely on technical aspects of social media platforms without psychological assessment.

### Data Extraction and Analysis

Relevant data from the included studies were extracted, including **author, year, country, study population, sample size, study design, outcomes, and key findings**. Thematic synthesis was applied to identify recurring patterns and categorize findings into the following domains:

- **Causes of FOMO** (e.g., social comparison, peer influence, self-esteem)
- **Psychological effects** (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress, burnout)
- **Behavioral outcomes** (e.g., excessive social media use, academic impact)
- **Coping strategies and interventions** (e.g., mindfulness, digital detox, counseling)

The narrative review approach allowed **critical discussion of trends, gaps, and practical implications**, particularly for **nursing students and healthcare professionals**, where FOMO has direct implications for academic performance, clinical training, and mental health.

**Table 1. Summary of Selected Studies on FOMO and Mental Health**

Author & Year	Study Population	Findings	Implications
Przybylski et al., 2013 (1)	Adults (UK, USA)	Developed FOMO scale; higher FOMO linked to lower life satisfaction	Validated concept and measurement

Abel et al., 2016 (2)	University students	FOMO positively related to time spent on social media	Risk of online dependency
Blackwell et al., 2017 (4)	Young adults	Extraversion and neuroticism	Personality influences
		predicted FOMO	vulnerability
Oberst et al., 2017 (7)	Adolescents	FOMO mediated link between social networking and negative outcomes	Highlighted adolescent susceptibility
Elhai et al., 2021 (5)	Chinese young adults	FOMO mediated depression and smartphone addiction	Need for mental health interventions
Akbari et al., 2023 (10)	Nursing students	FOMO linked with academic burnout	Relevance to nursing education

## DISCUSSION

FOMO arises when psychological needs for belonging, competence, and autonomy are unmet (1). Social comparison, information overload, and low self-esteem contribute to its occurrence (4,6,11). High levels of FOMO are correlated with anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and reduced productivity (3,5,10). In healthcare and academic settings, persistent digital vigilance leads to burnout and reduced focus.

### Overcoming FOMO

The management of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) requires a multi-faceted approach that targets both psychological and behavioral dimensions. Evidence-based strategies can help reduce anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and promote balanced digital use.

### Mindfulness and Gratitude

Mindfulness practices, including meditation, deep breathing, and body scanning, encourage individuals to focus on the present moment rather than comparing themselves to others online. Gratitude exercises, such as journaling positive experiences, shift attention from social comparison to personal satisfaction. Research indicates that mindfulness-based interventions significantly reduce FOMO-related anxiety and compulsive social media engagement (13). By increasing emotional awareness, individuals develop resilience to external validation and reduce dependency on social media for self-esteem.

### Digital Detox

Digital detox involves intentional restriction or scheduled breaks from social media and electronic devices. Examples include setting **screen-time limits**, creating **'no-phone zones'**, and designating device-free periods during meals or before bedtime. Studies have shown that digital detox reduces compulsive checking, improves sleep quality, and enhances psychological well-being among youth and healthcare professionals (12). Consistent digital breaks also allow for reflection and reduced cognitive overload caused by constant notifications.

### Cognitive Reframing

Cognitive reframing involves challenging negative thought patterns and unrealistic perceptions. Individuals are guided to recognize that social media content is **curated** and not an accurate reflection of reality. This practice fosters **self-compassion**, reduces social comparison, and strengthens self-esteem. Cognitive-behavioral strategies addressing FOMO have been linked with lower anxiety, depression, and social media overuse (11).

### Real-World Engagement

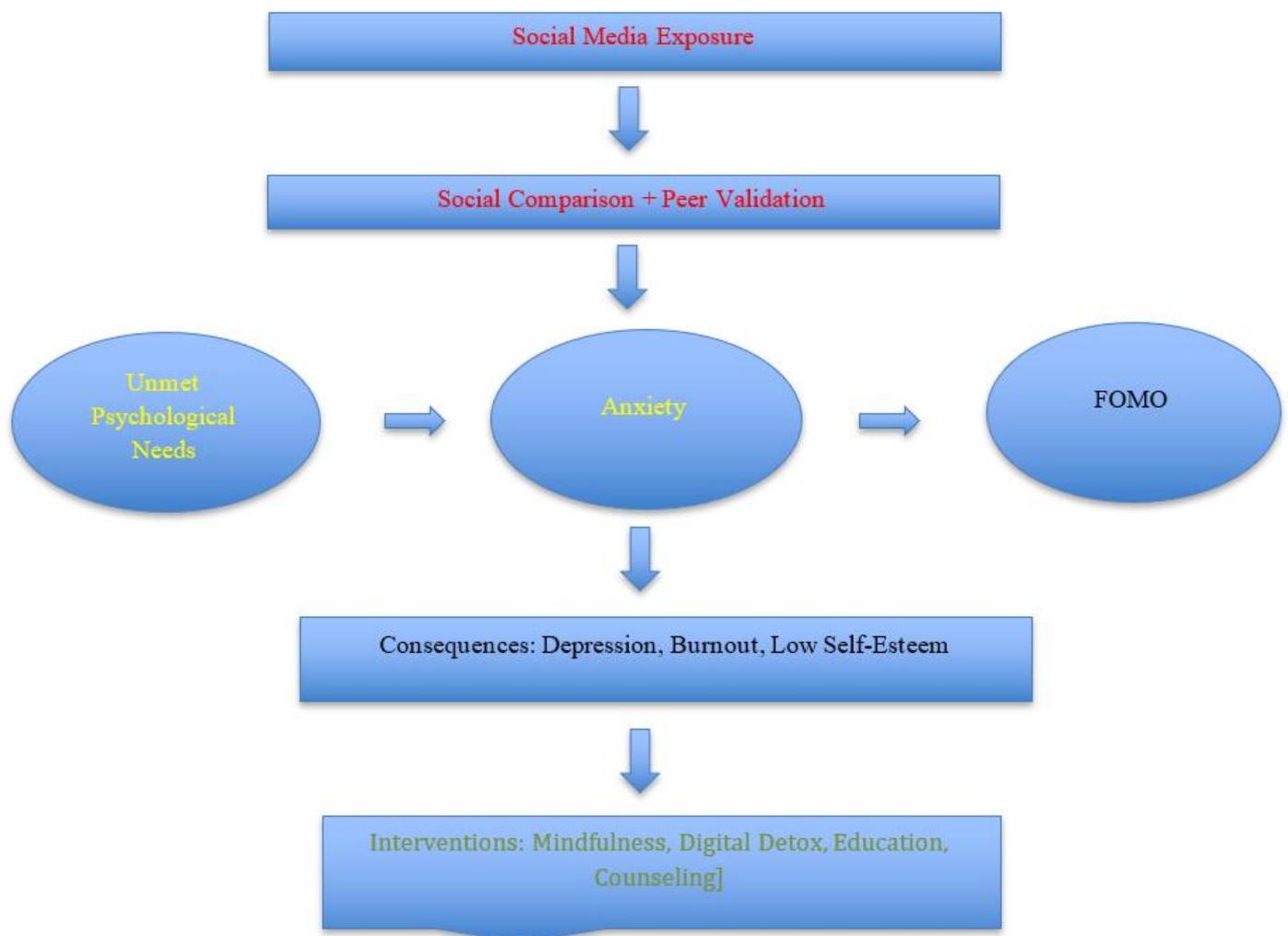
Participating in offline social activities, hobbies, volunteering, or group events satisfies the intrinsic human need for connection and belonging. Empirical evidence suggests that meaningful face-to-face interactions mitigate FOMO and reduce reliance on online validation (9,14). Encouraging individuals to cultivate **authentic social connections** promotes emotional well-being and helps maintain perspective regarding online interactions.

### Educational Interventions

Integrating digital wellness education into **nursing and healthcare curricula** is critical. Programs should focus on awareness of FOMO, its psychological consequences, and practical strategies for healthy social media use. Structured workshops, counseling sessions, and digital literacy training improve coping skills and emotional resilience among students and professionals (15). Early education equips individuals with tools to balance academic, professional, and digital engagement, fostering long-term mental well-being.

These strategies collectively address both **internal cognitive patterns** and **external digital behaviors**, enabling individuals to regain control over technology use and reduce FOMO-related stress

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of FOMO**



### CONCLUSION

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a significant psychosocial phenomenon in the digital age, particularly affecting adolescents, university students, and healthcare professionals who are constantly exposed to social media. FOMO reflects a **paradoxical conflict**: while technology facilitates connectivity, it also creates continuous opportunities for social comparison, validation-seeking, and perceived exclusion, which can undermine emotional well-being.

The literature consistently demonstrates that high levels of FOMO are associated with **increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, reduced self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and academic or professional burnout** (1,3,5,10). Nursing students and healthcare professionals are especially vulnerable, as the demands of clinical training, patient care, and academic responsibilities can exacerbate the psychological strain induced by FOMO. The persistent need to monitor social media and compare oneself to peers creates cognitive overload, reduces concentration, and compromises overall mental health.

Addressing FOMO requires a **multi-dimensional approach** that combines cognitive, behavioral, and institutional strategies. Evidence-based interventions such as **mindfulness, cognitive reframing, digital detox, real-world social engagement, and educational programs** have been shown to reduce compulsive social media use, improve emotional regulation, and enhance life satisfaction (9,11,12,13,15). By promoting awareness of FOMO and providing practical tools to manage social media habits, individuals can cultivate **digital well-being, resilience, and psychological balance**.

In conclusion, FOMO is more than a transient emotional state; it is a **behavioral and mental health concern** in modern society. Incorporating structured interventions into **nursing curricula and professional training** is critical for fostering self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and sustainable engagement with digital platforms. Ultimately, addressing FOMO not only improves mental health outcomes but also enhances **academic performance, professional efficacy, and overall quality of life** in an increasingly connected world.

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