

AN EXAMINATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT VARIABLES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the fear of missing out (FoMO) among university students according to various variables. This descriptive study was conducted with 379 students enrolled at a state university. The sample size was determined by power analysis, and data were collected using a Personal Information Form and the FoMO Scale. The study was initiated after obtaining approval from the ethics committee. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and analysis of variance. Fifty-one point seven percent of the participants were female, and 42.5% were first-year students. FoMO levels showed significant differences according to variables such as social media usage, academic year, department type, and social media and smartphone usage duration ($p < 0.05$). FoMO levels were higher among second-year students enrolled in vocational schools who used Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, and among those who actively shared content on social media. In conclusion, students who spend a significant amount of time interacting in digital environments tend to exhibit higher levels of FoMO. Therefore, awareness campaigns are recommended to encourage students to use digital tools consciously and in a controlled manner.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of social media platform use in the digital age has heightened concerns regarding its effects on individuals (Han et al., 2023). With technological advancements, new devices have become integrated into nearly every aspect of daily life, and as a result, communication needs are increasingly being met through social media. Through these platforms, individuals engage in various online activities such as forming and maintaining friendships, as well as sharing information, images, and videos. Although social media offers numerous opportunities for personal development, such as gender and identity exploration, self-expression, and socialization, it is increasingly evidenced that individuals at risk may develop addictive behaviors (Eker et al., 2023; Topino et al., 2023).

The diminishing distinction between the virtual and physical worlds has led to a growing inclination among individuals to spend more time in digital environments rather than in real-life activities (Üzgü et al., 2023). In contemporary society, particularly among young people,

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the excessive and unregulated use of digital devices has emerged as a significant social issue. The literature identifies several associated problems, including reduced engagement in real-world experiences, declines in academic performance, familial and relational conflicts, sleep disturbances, diminished attention and learning capacity, increased risks of obesity and depression, a decline in social skills, and deterioration in both psychological and physical health (Han et al., 2023; Hawi et al., 2019; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). As of January 2024, there are 5.35 billion internet users globally, accounting for 66.2% of the world's population. Of this total, 5.04 billion individuals – 62.3% of the global population – actively use social media. In terms of platform-specific statistics, 3.049 billion people use Facebook, 2.491 billion use YouTube, 2 billion use WhatsApp, and 1.562 billion use TikTok (Statista, 2024). According to the data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), the internet usage rate among young people aged 16–24 increased from 96.9% in 2022 to 97.5% in 2023. The same report noted that the most commonly used social media applications among individuals aged 16–74 were WhatsApp (84.9%), YouTube (69.0%), and Instagram (61.4%) (TÜİK, 2023).

The rapidly increasing rates of social media usage both globally and within Turkey have led individuals to spend extended periods on these platforms. This trend has fostered a growing concern among individuals that others may be experiencing rewarding moments from which they themselves are excluded, creating a constant urge to stay informed about others' activities. Consequently, the fear of missing out (FoMO) has emerged as a prevalent phenomenon on social media (Belgin et al., 2021).

The literature presents various theoretical perspectives on the foundations of FoMO. One explanation links FoMO to the psycho-social framework of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. According to this model, once individuals satisfy their basic physiological and safety needs, they progress to a stage characterized by the need for social connection. The influence of social media may intensify this need, potentially contributing to the development of FoMO (Çelik & Özkara, 2022). Another conceptual framework associated with FoMO is the theory of social exclusion, which emphasizes the fear of being marginalized from one's social environment (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Zhang et al., (2020), who further developed the FoMO concept, proposed that its theoretical basis lies in the self-perception theory introduced by Rosenberg (1979). According to this theory, individuals possess both personal and social aspects of self: the personal self refers to one's self-evaluation, while the social self pertains to perceptions of how others view the individual (Zhang et al., 2020).

FoMO can also be interpreted within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT posits that human motivation is grounded in the fulfillment of three basic psychological

needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. A failure to satisfy these needs may lead to psychological distress and diminished self-regulation. FoMO may arise from such deficiencies, intensifying individuals' efforts to establish social connections and enhance their sense of social competence by monitoring others' lives through social media. In this context, FoMO is viewed as a consequence of unmet psychological needs and helps to explain the relationship between these deficiencies and patterns of social media use. This theoretical framework offers a valuable foundation for understanding how FoMO influences social media engagement (Przybylski et al., 2013). For individuals experiencing fear of missing out, participation in social media becomes particularly appealing. A persistent desire to stay informed about others' lives and to track their online activity can result in negative emotional states. These individuals struggle to regulate their engagement, spending excessive time on social networks driven by a mix of desire and perceived obligation (Zıvdr & Karakul, 2023). As FoMO typically begins with a desire to remain informed about one's surroundings, it can lead, especially among young individuals with a strong desire for possession and experience, to a loss of control over their lives (Aydın, 2018). With the growing prevalence of social media use, FoMO has become increasingly recognized as a significant psychological concern. A study conducted with nursing students found a positive but weak correlation between social media addiction and FoMO (Eşer & Alkaya, 2019). Another study involving university students identified a moderate and positive relationship between these variables, noting that students who spent more than three hours daily on social media had significantly higher FoMO scores, which in turn amplified their levels of social media addiction (Çağlayan & Arslantaş, 2023). Research with postgraduate students reported moderate levels of both social media use and FoMO (Dündar & Biçer, 2024). In a separate study, male students were found to exhibit higher FoMO levels than their female peers, and students who remained online throughout the day reported higher FoMO levels than those who did not. Moreover, students using platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok showed significantly higher FoMO levels compared to non-users (Atabay et al., 2022). Similarly, a study with medical students found that those who frequently used various social media platforms and constantly checked notifications reported higher FoMO levels (Belgin et al., 2021). Regarding its impact on youth, excessive use of social media platforms associated with FoMO has been shown to disrupt sleep patterns, leading to later bedtimes (Güven, 2021). Other studies have reported that individuals with high levels of FoMO are more likely to engage in problematic alcohol use (Riordan et al., 2015), develop social media addiction (Blackwell et al., 2017), and experience internet dependency (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Additionally, the increased use of smartphones has been associated with a decline in students'

ability to focus during class and a subsequent drop in academic performance (Balcı & Bal, 2022).

In the digital age, shifts in communication culture, which are fueled by heightened curiosity, a desire for self-presentation, and competition, have intensified individuals' pursuit of experiences they perceive as lacking in their lives through social platforms. The advancement of technology and the widespread use of smartphones have led to a marked increase in dependency, contributing significantly to the spread of FoMO (Uyar & Özen, 2023). This study aims to provide valuable insights into the social and behavioral implications of social media addiction and FoMO. Moreover, as FoMO becomes more prevalent alongside the rising use of social media among university students, understanding its impact on their educational trajectories and personal development is crucial for designing effective intervention strategies. While the existing literature often addresses social media addiction and FoMO within a general framework, this study focuses specifically on university students, which offers a more nuanced understanding of how young individuals engage with the digital environment and develop social media habits. Within this context, the present research investigates university students' fear of missing out (FoMO) on social media with respect to various variables.

Research Questions:

1. What is the level of fear of missing out (FoMO) on social media among university students?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the social media platforms used by university students and their levels of FoMO?
3. Is there a significant relationship between university students' demographic characteristics, social media usage habits, and their FoMO levels?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Aim and Study Design

This study was conducted using a descriptive cross-sectional design to determine the level of fear of missing out (FoMO) on social media among university students and to examine FoMO in relation to various variables.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of students enrolled at a university ($n = 6,520$). The required sample size was calculated using power analysis via the G*Power 3.1 software. At a 95% confidence level ($1-\alpha$) and a significance threshold of 0.05 (α), the minimum sample size

was determined to be 363. A stratified sampling method was employed. In this method, subgroups (strata) are formed based on specific characteristics (e.g., faculty or school affiliation), and random sampling is performed within each stratum (Büyüköztürk et al., 2024; Yağar & Dökme, 2018). Accordingly, the participating students were divided into five strata based on their academic departments. After proportional allocation based on the number of students in each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select participants. Considering possible data loss, the final sample included 379 students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Inclusion Criteria

- Being a registered student at the university
- Voluntary participation in the study
- Completing all survey items

Exclusion Criteria

- Having a psychiatric condition that would prevent participation
- Providing incomplete responses to the survey or scales

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=379)

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	196	51.7
Male	183	48.3
Year of Study		
First year	161	42.5
Second year	100	26.4
Third year	48	12.7
Fourth year	70	18.5
Faculty/College		
Vocational School of Health Services	63	16.6
Faculty of Health Sciences	40	10.6
Faculty of Engineering / Faculty of Agriculture / Faculty of Theology	118	31.1
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences / Faculty of Tourism / School of Physical Education and Sports	48	12.7
Faculty of Fine Arts	57	15.0
Vocational School	53	14.0
Mother's Educational Level		
Illiterate	179	47.2
Primary School / Middle School	151	39.8
High School	30	7.9
University and above	19	5.0
Father's Educational Level		
Illiterate	46	12.1
Primary School / Middle School	219	57.8
High School	65	17.2
University and above	49	12.9

According to Table 1, 51.7% of the participants were female, 42.5% were first-year students, and 31.1% were enrolled in faculties such as Engineering, Agriculture, or Theology. In terms of parental education, 47.2% of the participants reported that their mothers were illiterate, while 57.8% stated that their fathers completed primary or middle school.

Data Collection

Personal Information Form: This form included questions related to the students' sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, year of study, faculty or vocational school, parents' educational background, use of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, purposes for using social media, frequency of sharing content on social media, daily smartphone use, and daily time spent on social media.

Scale: The data were collected through face-to-face interviews with university students using the Fear of Missing Out on Social Media Scale.

Fear of Missing Out on Social Media (FoMO) Scale

The scale was originally developed by Zhang et al., (2020). Its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Çelik et al., (2022). The scale consists of two subdimensions: Personal FoMO (5 items) and Social FoMO (4 items). It is a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree". The total score ranges from 9 to 63, with higher scores indicating greater levels of FoMO. In the original study, the Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.86 for Personal FoMO and 0.92 for Social FoMO, with excellent model fit indices for the two-factor structure. In the Turkish validation study by Çelik and Özkara (2022), Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.90 for Personal FoMO and 0.89 for Social FoMO. In the present study, the overall Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.92.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected between September and November 2024 through face-to-face interviews with the participating university students. The data collection process was carried out during students' non-class hours using two instruments: the Personal Information Form and the FoMO Scale. Prior to participation, the students were informed about the purpose of the study, and verbal consent was obtained. Data collection was conducted under the supervision of the researcher in classroom settings, through individual interviews lasting approximately 10–15 minutes per participant. A random sampling method was employed in selecting participants, and participation was entirely voluntary. The forms were administered during students' available time slots, such as breaks between classes or during free periods.

Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the participants' characteristics. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of data distribution. For normally distributed variables, Student's t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied. Since homogeneity of variance was confirmed, post hoc analyses were performed using the Tukey test. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are generalizable only to those students enrolled at the university where the research was conducted. Additionally, the study is limited to the students who were present and voluntarily participated during the data collection period.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of a University (Decision No: 01.08.2024-E-97974870-050.99-106972). Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, confirming their willingness to take part in the study.

RESULTS

This section presents the mean scores of the participants on the FoMO Scale and its subdimensions.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Participants on the FoMO Scale and Its Subdimensions

	Min.	Max.	X±SD
Personal FoMO	5	35	11.77±6.11
Social FoMO	4	28	9.21±5.68
Total FoMO	9	63	20.98±11.05

As shown in Table 2, the participants' average total FoMO score was 20.98 ± 11.05 . The mean scores for the FoMO subdimensions were 11.77 ± 6.11 for Personal FoMO and 9.21 ± 5.68 for Social FoMO. These results indicate that the students exhibited a moderate level of FoMO, with personal FoMO levels being higher than social FoMO levels. In Table 3, the FoMO scale and its subdimensions are compared according to the participants' use of social media platforms to assess whether there were significant differences based on platform usage.

Table 3. Comparison of Mean Scores on the FoMO Scale and Its Subdimensions by Social Media Platform Usage

Variables	n/%	Personal FoMO	Social FoMO	Total FoMO
Facebook Usage				
Yes	105/27.7	13.24±7.10	10.51±5.95	23.76±12.23
No	274/72.3	11.20±5.60	8.71±5.50	19.91±10.39
		t=-2.648	t=-2.688	t=-2.847
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
Instagram Usage				
Yes	293/77.3	13.94±8.24	11.31±6.95	25.25±14.48
No	86/22.7	11.13±5.18	8.59±5.10	19.73±9.49
		t=2.992	t=3.368	t=3.333
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
YouTube Usage				
Yes	221/58.3	12.65±6.88	10.12±6.73	22.78±12.88
No	158/41.7	11.13±5.43	8.56±4.70	19.69±9.34
		t=2.313	t=2.517	t=2.567
		P=0.02	P=0.01	P=0.01
TikTok Usage				
Yes	187/49.3	12.43±7.06	9.73±6.49	22.17±12.88
No	192/50.7	11.08±4.87	8.67±4.65	19.76±8.65
		t=2.172	t=1.821	t=2.130
		P=0.03	P=0.06	P=0.03

t: independent sample test; p<0.05

As presented in Table 3, statistically significant differences were found in personal FoMO, social FoMO, and total FoMO scores according to the participants' use of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok ($p < 0.05$). The participants who reported using these platforms had significantly higher scores on all dimensions of FoMO compared to those who did not. These findings suggest that social media usage habits play a meaningful role in shaping individuals' FoMO levels. To explore this relationship further, Table 4 presents a comparison of FoMO scores based on participants' demographic characteristics and patterns of social media use.

Table 4. Comparison of Mean Scores on the FoMO Scale and Its Subdimensions According to Participants' Demographic Characteristics and Social Media Use Habits

Variables	n/%	Personal FoMO	Social FoMO	Total FoMO
Year of Study				
First Year	161/42.5	10.93±5.37	8.58±5.10	19.51±9.78
Second Year	100/26.4	14.44±7.72	11.53±6.86	25.97±13.89
Third Year	48/12.7	10.62±4.18	7.85±3.98	18.47±7.32
Fourth Year	70/18.5	10.67±5.13	8.28±5.20	18.95±9.18
		F=9.240	F=8.181	F=10.003
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
Post Hoc		2>1, 2>3, 1>3,	2>1, 2>3	2>1, 2>3, 1>3
Faculty/College				
Vocational School of Health Services (1)	63/16.6	11.71±5.10	8.85±4.98	20.57±9.46
Faculty of Health Sciences (2)	40/10.6	10.92±3.96	9.12±5.43	20.05±8.84
Engineering/Agriculture/Theology (3)	118/31.1	10.74±5.13	8.51±5.32	19.26±9.40

Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences/Faculty of Tourism (4)	48/12.7	8.89±4.31	6.62±3.09	15.52±6.76
Fine Arts (5)	57/15.0	11.26±5.00	8.15±4.61	19.42±9.28
Vocational School (6)	53/14.0	17.90±8.76	14.73±6.90	32.64±14.59
		F= 16.479	F= 15.218	F= 18.481
		P= 0.00	P= 0.00	P= 0.00
Post Hoc		6>1,2,3,4,5	6>1,2,3,4,5	6>1,2,3,4,5
Purpose of Social Media Use				
Communicating with friends (1)	121/31.9	12.16±6.00	9.08±5.47	21.24±10.53
Making new friends (2)	30/7.9	12.80±7.80	10.00±6.96	22.80±13.93
Information seeking (3)	77/20.3	10.25±4.72	8.20±4.78	18.46±8.93
Sharing videos/photos (4)	32/8.4	16.43±8.10	13.46±6.69	29.90±13.64
Passing time (5)	119/31.4	10.83±5.27	8.65±5.33	19.48±10.07
		F=7.331	F=5.821	F=7.451
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
Post Hoc		4>1,2,3,5	4>1,2,3,5	4>1,2,3,5
Frequency of Social Media Sharing				
Never (1)	46/12.1	12.13±7.18	8.39±5.52	20.52±12.15
Every day (2)	78/20.6	14.57±8.12	11.46±6.80	26.03±14.10
Once a week (3)	102/26.9	11.63±4.86	9.25±5.63	20.89±9.67
Once a month (4)	106/28.0	10.56±4.88	8.33±4.74	18.89±8.99
Once or twice a year (5)	47/12.4	9.76±4.36	8.19±4.96	17.95±8.54
		F=6.845	F=4.475	F=6.255
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
Post Hoc		2>1, 2>5, 3>5	2>1, 2>5,	2>1, 2>5, 3>5
Daily Smartphone Use				
Less than 1 hour (1)	31/8.2	9.70±4.54	7.87±4.84	17.58±8.37
1-2 hours (2)	41/10.8	11.78±6.07	9.95±6.72	21.73±12.13
3-4 hours (3)	98/25.9	13.50±7.91	10.73±6.60	24.23±13.85
5 hours or more (4)	209/55.1	11.26±5.14	8.55±4.93	19.81±9.26
		F=4.378	F=4.189	F=4.782
		P=0.00	P=0.00	P=0.00
Post Hoc		3>1, 3>2, 5>1, 5>1	3>1, 3>2, 5>1, 5>1	3>1, 3>2, 5>1, 5>1
Daily Social Media Use				
Less than 1 hour	90/23.7	10.22±5.21	8.37±5.02	18.60±9.42
1-2 hours	76/20.1	11.02±5.75	8.53±5.12	19.56±10.04
3-4 hours	97/25.6	12.80±7.02	10.07±6.51	22.87±12.76
5 hours or more	116/30.6	12.59±5.94	9.58±5.68	22.18±10.99
		F=4.016	F=1.925	F=3.272
		P=0.00	P=0.12	P=0.02
Post Hoc		3>1, 3>2, 5>1,		3>1, 3>2, 5>1

F: One-way ANOVA (Post Hoc Tukey); p<0.05

Table 4 presents the comparison of the participants' scores on the FoMO Scale and its subdimensions based on their demographic characteristics and social media usage habits. Statistically significant differences were found in Personal FoMO, Social FoMO, and Total FoMO scores according to year of study ($p < 0.05$). Post hoc analyses revealed that the second-year students reported significantly higher levels of Personal FoMO, Social FoMO, and Total FoMO compared to the first- and third-year students. Furthermore, the first-year students also showed higher Personal and Total FoMO scores than the third-year students.

Significant differences were also identified based on the participants' faculty or vocational school ($p < 0.05$). According to further analyses, the students from Vocational Schools (Group 6) had significantly higher scores across all FoMO dimensions compared to the students from other faculties. Regarding the purpose of social media use, significant differences were observed in all FoMO dimensions ($p < 0.05$). The participants who used social media primarily for sharing videos and photos exhibited significantly higher levels of Personal FoMO, Social FoMO, and Total FoMO than those who used it for communication, making new friends, information seeking, or passing time.

The frequency of social media content sharing was also significantly associated with FoMO scores ($p < 0.05$). The students who shared content daily scored higher in all FoMO dimensions than those who never shared or who shared only once or twice per year. Additionally, the participants who shared weekly had higher Personal and Total FoMO scores than those who shared once or twice per year.

Significant differences were found in FoMO scores according to daily smartphone usage ($p < 0.05$). The participants who used their smartphones for 3–4 hours or more than 5 hours daily had significantly higher levels of Personal, Social, and Total FoMO compared to those who used them for less than 1 hour or for 1–2 hours.

Lastly, daily social media usage was significantly associated with Personal and Total FoMO scores ($p < 0.05$). The students who spent 3–4 hours or more than 5 hours per day on social media had significantly higher scores compared to those who used it for less than 1 hour or for 1–2 hours. Notably, those who used social media for 5 or more hours also had significantly higher scores than those who used it for less than 1 hour.

DISCUSSION

The rapid advancement of technology has undoubtedly facilitated everyday life; however, its excessive and inappropriate use has also contributed to various psychological, physical, and behavioral issues. Among young individuals in particular, the persistent desire to stay up to date through social media has been identified as a contributing factor to digital dependency (Korkmaz, 2023). Considering the transitional phase of university students preparing for adulthood, early identification of such issues is thought to be crucial for implementing preventive strategies and raising awareness.

Significant differences were observed in the total scores and subdimension scores (Personal FoMO and Social FoMO) of the FoMO Scale based on the participants' year of study. Notably, the second-year students exhibited higher levels of FoMO across all dimensions

compared to their peers in other academic years. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, taking into account the potential influence of sample characteristics. For instance, the relatively larger representation of the first-year students may have influenced the observed differences in FoMO scores among the second-year students. Consistent with these findings, a study by Çınar and Mutlu reported that first-year students had higher FoMO levels compared to fourth-year students (Çınar & Mutlu, 2018). Similarly, Kaçık & Acar (2020) found statistically significant differences in FoMO levels by academic year, with third-year students scoring higher than both first- and fourth-year students (Kaçık & Acar, 2020). In contrast, a study by Yaman and Kavuncu (2019) reported no significant differences in FoMO based on year of study (Yaman & Kavuncu, 2019). These discrepancies in literature may be attributed to variations in institutional curricula and exposure to media literacy education. As students progress in their academic careers, increased exposure to critical thinking, access to accurate information, and greater awareness of digital well-being may contribute to more mindful and regulated use of social media platforms. Thus, higher academic standing may be associated with more deliberate decision-making regarding media consumption.

It was found that the students enrolled in vocational schools exhibited higher levels of FoMO compared to those studying in other faculties or schools. This finding aligns with the study by Hoşgör (2019) which reported that students outside of health-related departments had higher average FoMO scores (Hoşgör et al., 2019). Similarly, research conducted with students in faculties of health sciences found that reduced time spent on social media was associated with a lower risk of developing FoMO and social media addiction (Tekin et al., 2024). These findings suggest that students from non-health disciplines may possess lower levels of awareness regarding the implications of social media and the digital environment. Their more frequent and intense engagement with these platforms appears to expose them to heightened levels of stress and anxiety induced by digital interactions. This underscores the need for integrating discussions of social media use into educational curricula and highlights the importance of raising awareness to prevent digital dependency.

Among the participating university students, those who reported using Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok had significantly higher FoMO levels than non-Susers. In a similar study, found a positive relationship between the number of social media platforms used and levels of fear of missing out (Çınar & Mutlu, 2018). Research conducted among medical students at the University of Khartoum in Sudan also identified a moderate positive correlation between social media usage intensity and FoMO (Mohammed et al., 2023). Likewise, a study involving Latinx students reported a positive association between social media use and fear of

missing out (Vernon et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings indicate that increased engagement with social media is closely linked to elevated levels of FoMO among students. Observed significantly lower levels of FoMO among individuals who abstained from social media, suggesting that excessive use of such platforms may contribute to the development of high FoMO tendencies (Montag & Markett, 2023). In another study, individuals who interacted with Facebook during peak hours of the day were found to have higher levels of FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013). Individuals experiencing FoMO often feel compelled to check social media immediately upon waking, driven by a fear that others may discover or share updates before they do. This constant desire to monitor social media activity reflects a deeper anxiety about being left behind in the digital social landscape (Aliçavuşoğlu & Boyraz, 2019).

In this study, it was found that the students who actively used social media exhibited higher levels of FoMO compared to those who did not. This finding suggests that social media usage is a contributing factor to increased levels of fear of missing out. Similar to prior research, the increase in FoMO appears to be associated with increased engagement in social media platforms.

The participants who reported using social media primarily for sharing videos and photos demonstrated significantly higher levels of Personal FoMO, Social FoMO, and Total FoMO compared to those who used it for other purposes such as communicating with friends, making new acquaintances, acquiring information, or passing time. This result aligns with the findings of Çağlayan and Arslantaş (2023), who observed that individuals who used social media for sharing content exhibited higher levels of social media addiction (Çağlayan & Arslantaş, 2023). The ease of posting and monitoring others' profiles in virtual environments has enabled individuals to remain connected independent of time and space. Social media has thus become an indispensable part of daily life, especially for users who continuously track others' posts (Tanhan et al., 2022). These findings indicate that FoMO is strongly linked to the constant need for updates and information through social media. The elevated FoMO levels among students who share visual content may be driven by a desire for self-expression and visibility on these platforms. Key drivers of FoMO include constant exposure to others' shared experiences, the pressure to participate in visible activities, continuous online presence, and the number of social media accounts used (Shi et al., 2023; Zhu & Xiong, 2022). In this regard, using social media for content sharing may lead individuals to engage in more frequent interactions and become increasingly sensitive to feedback received from these engagements.

In the study, those individuals who posted daily had significantly higher Personal, Social, and Total FoMO scores compared to those who never posted or posted only once or twice per

year. Furthermore, the participants who shared content weekly had higher Personal and Total FoMO scores than those who shared less frequently. This is consistent with findings from Uygun and Kalender (2023), who reported that individuals posting daily had significantly higher FoMO scores than less frequent users (Uygun & Kalender, 2023). A study conducted among nursing students revealed a positive relationship between daily smartphone usage, time spent online via smartphones, and the frequency of checking smartphones (e.g., once per hour) with FoMO levels (Tuna et al., 2023). These results support the notion that greater social media interaction and constant online activity may heighten fear of missing out, and that frequent checking behaviors may further exacerbate this psychological tendency. In parallel with other studies, the current findings confirm that the frequency of social media posting is a significant factor contributing to the development of FoMO. Prolonged engagement with social media platforms and frequent sharing behaviors appear to contribute to the intensification of FoMO. Increased social interaction on these platforms may lead individuals to monitor their own content more frequently and spend additional time online out of fear of missing others' updates.

In this study, the participants who reported using their smartphones for 3–4 hours or more than 5 hours per day had significantly higher levels of Personal FoMO, Social FoMO, and Total FoMO compared to those who used them for less than 1 hour or between 1–2 hours. This finding is supported reported that increased frequency of smartphone checking was associated with elevated levels of FoMO (Hoşgör et al., 2019). Similarly, in a study conducted among medical students, those who checked their smartphones more than 50 times per day had significantly higher FoMO scores than those with fewer interactions, and social media users exhibited higher FoMO levels than non-users (Akbay et al., 2020). Given that smartphones provide constant and immediate access to social media, students aiming to avoid missing out can remain connected at all times and in any location. The widespread adoption of smartphones appears to contribute to increased FoMO through the greater ease and frequency of social media access.

Additionally, the participants who spent 3–4 hours or more than 5 hours per day on social media reported significantly higher Personal and Total FoMO scores than those who used social media for less than 1 hour or 1–2 hours daily. Notably, the students who spent over 5 hours per day on social media had significantly higher FoMO scores than those using it for less than an hour. These findings are consistent with the results of who found that health sciences students spending 6 or more hours per day on social media had significantly higher scores in Total FoMO, social tolerance, and virtual communication subdimensions than those who used it for 2 hours or less (Tekin et al., 2024). Akbay et al., (2020) also observed that medical students with higher daily social media use reported greater fear of missing out (Akbay et al., 2020).

Likewise, Eker et al., (2023) reported that students who spent 3–6 hours on social media had significantly higher FoMO levels compared to those who used it for less than an hour (Eker et al., 2023). Prolonged engagement with social media may weaken real-life friendships and increase the severity of dependence (Zıvıdır & Karakul, 2023). In line with previous research, extended time spent on social media contributes to the development of FoMO. Long-term use of these platforms may lead individuals to disengage from real-world social environments, intensifying curiosity and time spent in digital spaces. This, in turn, may heighten FoMO and foster a tendency to constantly monitor others' lives and compare them with one's own experiences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that Instagram was the most frequently used social media platform among the participants, with 77.3% reporting active use. The results also demonstrated that FoMO levels were significantly higher among those in their second year of study, those enrolled in vocational schools, those who used platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, those who primarily used social media for sharing videos and photos, those who posted daily, and those who spent 3–4 hours per day on smartphones and social media.

In light of these findings, it is essential to develop effective counseling programs that promote digital awareness and time management skills to foster more mindful and controlled use of social media among students. To mitigate the negative effects of FoMO, supportive initiatives such as stress management workshops, emotional regulation training, and group therapy sessions aimed at enhancing psychological resilience are recommended. These programs may help students maintain a healthy balance in their digital lives. Integrating courses on media literacy, responsible internet use, and addiction prevention into university curricula would be a crucial step. Additionally, encouraging student participation in cultural and social activities, organizing sports events, and providing opportunities to pursue hobbies should be complemented by accessible psychological counseling services. Such measures may contribute to reducing social media dependence and promoting overall digital well-being. Future research could investigate the impact of FoMO on health behaviors, particularly in relation to dietary habits, sleep patterns, and harmful behaviors such as smoking or alcohol consumption. The results of this study may inform policy development regarding social media use and serve as a foundation for youth-centered awareness programs, offering actionable insights for real-world applications.

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Conflict of Interest

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