AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO), SOCIAL COMPARISON, AND DEPRESSION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: AN EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

A

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Psychology (Clinical and Counselling) to MIER College of Education (Autonomous), is an authentic record of my own research work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Taniya Raina, Assistant Professor.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FoMO	Fear of Missing Out
SNS	Social Networking Sites
INCOM	Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure
BDI-II	Beck Depression Inventory-II
PSMU	Problematic Social Media Use
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SCC	Self-Concept Clarity
PIU	Problematic Internet Use
SWB	Subjective Well-Being
CBT	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
APA	American Psychological Association
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
M	Mean
SD	Standard Deviation
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
ROL	Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social networking sites has fundamentally altered the psychological landscape for young adults, creating conditions that amplify Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depressive symptoms. The present study investigated the interplay between these three constructs among social media users. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was employed with a convenience sample of 123 participants from Jammu district. FoMO was assessed using the FoMO Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013), social comparison using the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons &Buunk, 1999), and depression using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II; Beck et al., 1996). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-tests via SPSS.

Results revealed that participants reported moderate levels of FoMO and social comparison, and moderately severe levels of depression. A significant positive correlation was found between FoMO and social comparison ($r = .29$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher FoMO is associated with greater tendencies to compare oneself with others. The anticipated associations between FoMO and depression and between social comparison and depression were not statistically significant in this sample. No significant gender differences were found for any of the three variables, indicating that FoMO, social comparison, and depression are experienced comparably across male and female young adult social media users in this sample.

The findings are discussed in relation to the existing literature on digital psychology, with implications for psychological screening, mental health education, and intervention design targeting young adult social media users. Limitations and directions for future research are outlined.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out, social comparison, depression, social networking sites, young adults, digital psychology, Jammu

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is widely recognized as a pivotal developmental stage characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and social transformations. Typically spanning the ages of 18 to 25 years, this period involves increased autonomy, identity exploration, formation of intimate relationships, and the establishment of academic or career trajectories. These changes occur alongside heightened sensitivity to social belonging, peer acceptance, and self-worth, making young adults particularly vulnerable to social influences (Arnett, 2014). In recent decades, the rapid proliferation of digital technologies has reshaped the social environment in which these developmental processes unfold. With smartphones, high-speed internet, and social networking sites (SNSs) becoming integral to everyday functioning, young adults now rely heavily on digital communication and online social interactions as part of their daily routines.

SNS platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook have emerged as dominant spaces for self-presentation, interaction, and emotional expression among young adults. These platforms offer various benefits, including opportunities for maintaining social ties, expressing creativity, sharing personal milestones, and accessing informational resources. However, the structural design of these platforms emphasizing metrics such as likes, followers, comments, shares, and algorithm-driven visibility can also cultivate psychological vulnerabilities. SNSs frequently expose users to a curated and idealized portrayal of others' lives, often showcasing highlights such as achievements, social outings, travel experiences, material possessions, or physical attractiveness. Continuous exposure to such carefully selected content can affect individuals' emotional states, self-evaluations, and perceptions of social success.

A growing body of research demonstrates that digital environments can amplify comparison tendencies, generate feelings of inadequacy, intensify anxiety, and contribute to depressive symptoms (Burnell et al., 2019; Fioravanti et al., 2021). For instance, the phenomenon of encountering "highlight reels"—the most positive and flattering versions of others' lives—creates an unrealistic social standard, encouraging

individuals to evaluate their own experiences in contrast to idealized content. Steers et al. (2014) found that viewing others' curated social media posts heightened feelings of inferiority and contributed to depressive symptoms, identifying social comparison as a central mechanism in this process. Such evidence indicates that online social environments may distort perceptions of normalcy, success, and happiness, particularly among impressionable young populations.

Within this digital context, three psychological constructs—Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression—have emerged as central to understanding the emotional and behavioral consequences of social media engagement. FoMO, conceptualized as a pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences without one's involvement, is strongly reinforced by real-time social updates and notifications embedded within SNS platforms. Research consistently demonstrates that FoMO is highly prevalent among young adults who frequently interact with digital technologies (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Studies also highlight FoMO's significant associations with problematic smartphone use, compulsive social media engagement, and emotional distress (Wolniewicz et al., 2021; Fioravanti et al., 2021). Zheng et al. (2025) found that interpersonal curiosity fueled FoMO among university students, particularly when combined with passive engagement and upward social comparison. This suggests that FoMO is not merely a social concern but a psychological mechanism that emerges from specific patterns of digital behavior.

Social comparison, another critical construct, refers to the tendency to evaluate one's own abilities, achievements, and characteristics relative to others. Digital platforms intensify this process by providing constant access to information about peers' accomplishments, physical appearance, consumption patterns, and lifestyle choices. Upward social comparison—comparing oneself to those perceived as better off—has been shown to be particularly detrimental. Studies indicate that upward comparison heightens emotional distress, reduces self-esteem, and promotes compensatory behaviors such as increased self-presentation efforts or compulsive SNS use (Steinberger & Kim, 2023; Dinh & Lee, 2025). Servidio et al. (2024) found that FoMO was associated with increased social comparison tendencies, which subsequently contributed to problematic social media use and reduced self-esteem

among university students. These findings suggest that social comparison acts as a key psychological pathway linking digital engagement with negative emotional outcomes.

The third construct of interest—depression—is closely intertwined with FoMO and social comparison, particularly within digital environments. Depression among young adults is a growing public health concern, and numerous studies have shown that excessive social media use, particularly in passive forms such as scrolling or lurking, is associated with depressive symptoms. Burnell et al. (2019) reported that passive SNS use increased social comparison and FoMO, which in turn predicted higher levels of depression and lower emotional well-being. Sommantico et al. (2023) observed that depression predicted FoMO and social media addiction, with self-esteem mediating these relationships. These findings illustrate a reciprocal relationship: while digital behaviors influenced by FoMO and comparison may lead to depression, individuals experiencing depressive symptoms may also turn to social media as a coping mechanism, further worsening their emotional states.

Empirical evidence from diverse cultural contexts reinforces the significance of examining FoMO, social comparison, and depression among young adults. For instance, Steinberger & Kim (2023) found that FoMO contributed indirectly to depression among Indian young adults through problematic media use and phubbing. Malik et al. (2025) reported that social comparison and loneliness significantly predicted FoMO and emotional exhaustion among Malaysian youth. Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) demonstrated that FoMO reduced subjective well-being among adolescents, with social comparison and loneliness functioning as mediators. These cross-cultural findings suggest that although digital habits vary by society, the psychological mechanisms underlying FoMO and comparison are universal.

The cyclical and mutually reinforcing nature of FoMO, social comparison, and depression is a recurring theme in digital psychology research. FoMO increases SNS engagement, which exposes individuals to comparison-inducing content; comparison heightens emotional distress, lowering self-worth and contributing to depressive symptoms; depression, in turn, may increase reliance on social media as a means of distraction or emotional compensation (Sommantico et al., 2023; Servidio et al., 2021). This cycle demonstrates the importance of understanding these constructs

collectively rather than in isolation. Furthermore, theoretical models such as the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the I-PACE model provide a framework for explaining these interactions, suggesting that unmet psychological needs, low self-concept clarity, and individual vulnerabilities shape digital behavior and its emotional consequences (Buglass et al., 2017; Servidio et al., 2021).

The prominence of social media in young adults' lives makes understanding these constructs particularly important. College students, in particular, face heightened pressures related to academic performance, peer acceptance, personal identity, and future uncertainty. SNS platforms often serve as spaces for seeking validation, expressing identity, and maintaining social presence. However, they also provide constant access to peer-related cues that may trigger FoMO, comparison, and emotional distress. Given the ubiquity of digital technologies and the increasing reliance on social media for communication, examining FoMO, social comparison, and depression among young adults is both timely and essential.

Collectively, the existing body of literature underscores that digital engagement has profound implications for psychological well-being. As young adults continue to navigate the complexities of the digital age, understanding the mechanisms through which SNSs influence emotional states becomes crucial. By focusing on FoMO, social comparison, and depression, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological landscape of young adults in digitally saturated environments

My study collectively highlights that the digital environment has become a powerful psychological space in which young adults navigate identity, belonging, and emotional well-being. The literature consistently shows that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression operate in a cyclical and mutually reinforcing manner within social networking sites. FoMO drives increased engagement with SNSs, exposing individuals to idealized portrayals of others' lives, which intensifies upward social comparison and feelings of inadequacy. These comparison-driven emotional vulnerabilities heighten depressive symptoms, while depression itself increases passive browsing and compulsive online behaviors, further deepening FoMO and comparison tendencies. Cross-cultural findings confirm that this pattern is universal, with problematic digital habits mediating the relationship

between these constructs. Overall, the study suggests that young adults' emotional well-being is significantly shaped by their digital interactions, emphasizing the need to understand FoMO, social comparison, and depression as interconnected psychological mechanisms rather than isolated phenomena.

1.1 FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO)

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has emerged as one of the most influential psychological constructs in understanding digital-age behaviors, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FoMO is deeply connected to the rise of social networking sites (SNSs) and the constant awareness of social events, achievements, and interpersonal engagements shared online. The concept gained visibility in early research on social media and has since become central to explaining a wide range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. The Review of Literature (ROL) demonstrates that FoMO is not only widespread but also intricately linked to psychological vulnerabilities, social comparison, addiction-like SNS behaviors, and emotional difficulties.

FoMO is fundamentally driven by a desire for social inclusion, relational belonging, and real-time awareness of peers' activities. Several studies from the ROL highlight that FoMO often arises from interpersonal curiosity and the need to remain socially updated. Zheng et al. (2025) found that interpersonal curiosity was a strong predictor of FoMO among university students, suggesting that FoMO stems not merely from insecurity but also from a cognitive desire to stay informed about others. Notably, this relationship was partially mediated by passive social media engagement and upward comparison tendencies. Passive browsing—where individuals scroll through content without interacting—provides fertile ground for comparison and heightens awareness of social opportunities, reinforcing FoMO. This finding aligns with broader research showing that SNS architecture, designed for continuous updates, encourages habitual checking behavior.

A consistent pattern across recent FoMO studies is its strong association with problematic or compulsive social networking use. Multiple studies from 2024–2025 underscore that FoMO acts as a motivational force driving individuals toward

excessive digital consumption. Tandon et al. (2025) demonstrated that FoMO predicted both benign and malicious envy, which subsequently resulted in SNS stalking and compulsive use. These results highlight that FoMO not only drives emotional responses but also initiates behaviors that deepen digital engagement, often in maladaptive ways. Similarly, Servidio et al. (2024) reported that FoMO significantly predicted problematic social media use among Italian university students, with social comparison and lowered self-esteem serving as sequential mediators. These findings suggest that FoMO triggers comparison tendencies, which subsequently reinforce negative self-appraisals and compulsive usage patterns.

FoMO is also associated with a wide range of psychosocial predictors, particularly those linked to self-evaluation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning. Piko et al. (2025) found that social comparison, social media addiction, loneliness, and perfectionistic traits all significantly predicted FoMO. This indicates that individuals who rely heavily on external validation or who experience interpersonal or emotional difficulties may be more susceptible to FoMO-driven behaviors. Such findings support theoretical assertions that FoMO is rooted in unmet psychological needs, particularly those related to self-worth and belonging. Studies by Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) further reinforce this perspective by showing that FoMO was associated with reduced subjective well-being and heightened loneliness among adolescents, with social comparison and loneliness mediating these effects. These results collectively demonstrate that FoMO is not a standalone construct but one embedded within broader psychological and social processes.

FoMO’s consequences extend beyond emotional distress to include behavioral risks in both digital and offline contexts.FoMO has been shown to influence consumer decision-making. Kumar and Kumar (2024) reported that FoMO mediated the link between compulsive social media use and impulsive buying among Indian youth, revealing that individuals driven by FoMO may engage in unrestrained consumption in an effort to keep up with perceived social norms. In the context of influencer culture, Dinh and Lee (2024) found that exposure to social media influencers increased FoMO and materialistic tendencies among followers, ultimately promoting conspicuous consumption. These findings illustrate that FoMO not only influences

personal emotions and online habits but also extends into economic and lifestyle behaviors.

FoMO also plays a significant role in predicting psychological health outcomes. Multiple studies from the ROL demonstrate that FoMO is closely linked with indicators of poor mental health, including emotional exhaustion, depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem. Malik et al. (2025) found that FoMO predicted emotional exhaustion among Malaysian youth, suggesting that constant awareness of social events and perceived exclusion drains emotional resources. Steinberger & Kim (2023) reported that FoMO indirectly contributed to depression through problematic social media use and phubbing, reflecting how FoMO-driven behaviors can disrupt real-life social interactions and emotional stability. This is consistent with findings from Sommantico et al. (2023), who observed that depression increased FoMO levels and social media addiction among young adults. These studies collectively highlight a bidirectional relationship between FoMO and mental health difficulties, where FoMO increases psychological distress and existing distress further heightens FoMO.

FoMO is also linked to cognitive and behavioral mechanisms such as digital hoarding, smartphone addiction, and phubbing. Wang et al. (2023) found that upward comparison increased digital hoarding behaviors, with FoMO serving as a mediator. This suggests that individuals fear losing access to information or social content and therefore accumulate digital materials excessively. Akbari et al. (2021) demonstrated that FoMO predicted smartphone addiction and phubbing behaviors, especially when coupled with loneliness and comparison tendencies. These patterns reflect FoMO's capacity to shape not only emotional experiences but also everyday digital habits, interpersonal connections, and self-regulation capacities.

An important insight from the literature is the role of individual differences in determining FoMO susceptibility. Several studies highlight factors such as self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and psychological need satisfaction as central to FoMO's development. Servidio et al. (2021) reported that individuals with lower self-concept clarity exhibited greater FoMO, which subsequently increased problematic smartphone use. Buglass et al. (2017) situated FoMO within Self-Determination Theory, suggesting that unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness heighten FoMO-driven behaviors. Furthermore, Barry and Wong (2020) found that

FoMO was not a generational trend but rather a function of individual vulnerabilities such as loneliness and low self-esteem, emphasizing that personal emotional landscapes play a major role in shaping FoMO experiences.

Intervention studies also provide evidence that FoMO can be managed. Sommantico et al. (2023) showed that reducing social comparison tendencies through training improved psychological well-being, particularly among individuals high in comparison orientation. Hunt et al. (2018) demonstrated that limiting social media use significantly reduced FoMO, loneliness, and depression, offering causal evidence for FoMO's role in emotional distress. These interventions underscore that FoMO is modifiable, and targeted strategies may help reduce its negative effects.

Finally, large-scale reviews and meta-analyses further validate FoMO as a pervasive and influential psychological construct. Fioravanti et al. (2021) found robust associations between FoMO, SNS use, and problematic online behaviors across 21,473 participants, confirming the universality of these relationships. Akbari et al. (2021), analyzing over 55,000 participants, reported that FoMO consistently predicted higher internet use, with effects intensifying during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such comprehensive findings highlight FoMO's central role in shaping digital-age psychological functioning.

1.2 SOCIAL COMPARISON

Social comparison is a core psychological process shaping how individuals evaluate their abilities, achievements, and social standing relative to others. In the digital era, this process has become amplified through widespread engagement with social networking sites (SNSs), where users are constantly exposed to curated and idealized visual representations of peers' lives. The Review of Literature (ROL) demonstrates that social comparison—especially upward comparison—plays a central role in influencing emotional well-being, problematic digital behaviors, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and other psychosocial outcomes among adolescents and young adults. In online environments, users frequently encounter selective content reflecting others' accomplishments, appearance, lifestyle, academic success, and social involvement. Such exposure intensifies comparison tendencies, often resulting in negative self-appraisals and emotional distress.

Social comparison operates through two major forms: comparison of ability (evaluating how skilled or successful one is relative to others) and comparison of opinion (evaluating personal beliefs or attitudes). However, empirical research indicates that ability-based comparisons are more detrimental to psychological well-being in digital contexts. Steinberger and Kim (2023) found that social comparison of ability uniquely mediated the relationship between subjective well-being and SNS addiction, while opinion-based comparison did not play a significant role. This finding underscores the heightened emotional impact of seeing peers' achievements, physical appearance, or popularity online, reinforcing the notion that digital environments exacerbate upward comparison tendencies.

Social comparison frequently co-occurs with FoMO, and together they create reinforcing psychological cycles. Numerous studies highlight that FoMO increases the tendency to compare oneself with others, while comparison heightens awareness of what one might be "missing." Dinh and Lee (2025) demonstrated that greater social media exposure increased upward comparison, which subsequently elevated FoMO and strengthened self-presentation motivations. Similarly, Servidio et al. (2024) found that FoMO significantly predicted social comparison tendencies, which in turn contributed to problematic social media use and reduced self-esteem. These findings illustrate how SNS usage encourages habitual monitoring of others' lives, strengthening cognitive comparisons and contributing to maladaptive digital behaviors.

Social comparison also emerges as a significant predictor of FoMO, particularly in young adults and adolescents. Piko et al. (2025) reported that higher social comparison tendencies significantly predicted FoMO among university students, along with loneliness and perfectionism. Malik et al. (2025) obtained similar results in Malaysian youth, where social comparison significantly predicted FoMO and contributed to emotional exhaustion. These findings demonstrate continuity across cultures and contexts: individuals who regularly compare themselves with peers are more prone to anxiety about being excluded or left behind in social or experiential domains.

Beyond its association with FoMO, social comparison is closely connected to problematic social media use (PSMU), smartphone addiction, and phubbing

behaviors. Parveiz et al. (2023) found that social comparison significantly predicted social media addiction, with young adults who engaged in more frequent comparisons reporting greater compulsive online behaviors. Akbari et al. (2021)identified social comparison as a significant mediator in the link between smartphone addiction and phubbing, demonstrating that individuals who evaluate themselves against peers are more likely to engage in technology-driven withdrawal from real-life interactions. These findings suggest that comparison processes not only affect internal emotional states but also alter interpersonal behavior patterns in everyday life.

Additional evidence from links social comparison to diminished well-being and increased emotional distress, particularly among youth. Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) reported that social comparison mediated the relationship between FoMO and lower subjective well-being among adolescents. Increased comparison tendencies were associated with lower self-worth and greater loneliness, illustrating the emotional toll of constant social evaluation. Similarly, Burnell et al. (2019) found that passive SNS use increased social comparison, which subsequently heightened FoMO and predicted depressive symptoms, lower physical appearance satisfaction, and reduced social acceptance. These findings confirm that comparison processes play a central role in shaping emotional responses to digital content.

Social comparison also emerges as a key mechanism within digital consumer behavior. The ROL highlights that exposure to influencers or idealized peer content can activate upward comparison, leading to changes in consumption patterns. Dinh and Lee (2024) showed that exposure to social media influencers increased social comparison and materialistic tendencies, which contributed to conspicuous consumption behaviors among young adults. Similarly, Kumar and Kumar (2024) demonstrated that social comparison mediated the relationship between compulsive social media use and impulsive buying behaviors among Indian youth. These results show that comparison not only affects emotional well-being but also has behavioral consequences in economic and lifestyle domains.

Social comparison is deeply intertwined with self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and psychological need satisfaction. Studies suggest that individuals with lower self-esteem or less clarity about their identity are more vulnerable to the negative effects of comparison. For instance, Servidio et al. (2021) found that low self-concept clarity

predicted higher social comparison, which sequentially predicted FoMO and problematic smartphone use. Buglass et al. (2017) located social comparison within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), showing that individuals with unmet needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness were more likely to engage in comparison and compulsive social media use. These findings reinforce that comparison behaviors are rooted in deeper psychological needs and vulnerabilities.

Social comparison is not only a predictor of negative psychological states but also a mediator linking SNS use to emotional outcomes. Numerous studies from the ROL identify social comparison as a key mechanism explaining why digital engagement affects well-being.Reer et al. (2019) showed that social comparison orientation mediated the relationship between decreases in psychosocial well-being (e.g., anxiety, loneliness) and increased social media engagement. This means that individuals experiencing emotional difficulties are more likely to engage in comparison-laden SNS behaviors, which further exacerbate distress. Burns et al. (2019) similarly found that comparison mediated the relationship between passive browsing and decreased self-worth, illustrating its central role in digital emotional processing.

In some cases, social comparison is linked to more specific behavioral outcomes, such as digital hoarding. Wang et al. (2023) demonstrated that upward social comparison on SNSs predicted digital hoarding behaviors, with FoMO serving as a mediator. This suggests that individuals may accumulate digital content, not out of necessity, but as a psychological response to perceived social expectations or opportunities.

Despite its risks, evidence suggests that social comparison is modifiable. Sommantico et al. (2023) conducted an intervention that trained participants to reduce social comparison on social media; participants exhibited improved psychological well-being after the intervention, especially those who initially had high levels of comparison. These results offer promising indications that targeted psychoeducational strategies can help mitigate the negative impact of comparison on emotional well-being.

Social comparison is a central psychological mechanism in understanding the emotional and behavioral consequences of social media use. It operates as both a predictor and mediator of FoMO, depression, problematic smartphone use, emotional

exhaustion, and compulsive SNS behaviors. Comparison is reinforced by platform design, personal vulnerabilities, and interpersonal contexts, making it a complex but critical factor in digital psychological research. Its consistent association with negative emotional states and maladaptive digital behaviors highlights the importance of studying social comparison as a primary variable in understanding young adults' mental health in the digital era.

1.3 DEPRESSION

Depression has become one of the most pressing mental health issues affecting young adults, a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, increased autonomy, academic pressures, and heightened sensitivity to peer relationships. This age group is particularly vulnerable to emotional disturbances because they are simultaneously navigating social transitions and exploring self-concept, making them susceptible to factors that disrupt psychological stability. In recent years, the widespread adoption of digital technologies and social networking sites has intensified these vulnerabilities, as online environments increasingly shape emotional experiences, self-evaluations, and interpersonal interactions.

A consistent finding across contemporary research is that passive social media use contributes to depressive symptoms by fostering upward social comparison and increasing feelings of inadequacy. Burnell et al. (2019) demonstrated that passive browsing on social networking sites heightened social comparison and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), both of which were associated with increased depressive symptoms, lower physical appearance satisfaction, and reduced social acceptance. Young adults viewing highly curated content online may perceive others as more socially successful, attractive, or fulfilled, leading to self-doubt and sadness. This pattern of comparison is especially common during emerging adulthood, when individuals are still developing a stable sense of identity and competence.

Depression among young adults is also closely linked to FoMO and problematic social media engagement. Steinberger & Kim (2023) found that FoMO predicted higher levels of depression indirectly through problematic media use and phubbing behaviors. According to their findings, individuals who frequently fear missing out tend to engage excessively with their mobile phones, often at the expense of

meaningful in-person interactions. Over time, this contributes to social withdrawal, decreased satisfaction with social relationships, and elevated depressive symptoms. Similarly, Malik et al. (2025) showed that FoMO significantly predicted emotional exhaustion among Malaysian youth, suggesting that constantly monitoring social activities and updates drains emotional resources and increases psychological fatigue.

Evidence also shows that depression itself increases FoMO and problematic social networking behaviors, creating a cyclical relationship. Sommantico et al. (2023) reported that depressive symptoms were associated with heightened FoMO and social media addiction among young adults. Their findings indicated that lower self-esteem mediated this relationship, suggesting that individuals with depressive tendencies may rely more heavily on social media for reassurance or distraction. However, this reliance often intensifies depressive feelings, as individuals are exposed to comparison-inducing content and interactions that may reinforce negative self-evaluations.

Social comparison is another central mechanism linking digital engagement to depression. Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) found that social comparison and loneliness mediated the association between FoMO and lower subjective well-being in adolescents. Although the population studied was younger, the mechanisms apply to young adults as well: individuals who frequently compare themselves to others online often experience heightened loneliness, reduced life satisfaction, and elevated depressive symptoms. Similarly, Reer et al. (2019) observed that loneliness, anxiety, and depression were positively associated with increased social media engagement and that social comparison orientation and FoMO jointly mediated these relationships.

Additional behavioral indicators associated with depression include smartphone addiction, phubbing, and digital overuse. akbari et al. (2021)reported that social comparison mediated the relationship between smartphone addiction and phubbing among young adults. Excessive phone use not only decreases the quality of face-to-face interactions but also increases feelings of isolation, which are strongly linked to depressive outcomes. The compulsive need to remain connected digitally may lead individuals to detach from meaningful real-world social relationships, deepening depressive symptoms over time.

Young adults experiencing depression also demonstrate greater vulnerability to consumption-based coping behaviors influenced by social comparison. Studies such as Dinh and Lee (2024) and Kumar and Kumar (2024) found that exposure to influencers and upward comparison tendencies increased materialism, impulsive buying, and conspicuous consumption. While these behaviors may temporarily elevate mood, they often result in guilt, financial stress, and a deepened sense of inadequacy, all of which contribute to depressive symptomatology.

Depression among young adults is not only influenced by comparison or digital overuse but also by daily emotional fluctuations triggered by social media interactions. Adams (2021), using daily diary methods, found that daily changes in FoMO were associated with increased anxiety, depression, and upward comparison. This suggests that depressive symptoms can be affected by moment-to-moment social media interactions and emotional reactions, making young adults particularly sensitive to online stimuli. Notifications, updates, or posts encountered throughout the day can immediately trigger feelings of sadness, exclusion, or inadequacy.

Identity-related vulnerabilities also contribute to depressive symptoms. Servidio et al. (2021) found that low self-concept clarity predicted higher FoMO and social comparison, which in turn contributed to problematic smartphone use. Young adults still developing a coherent sense of identity may experience greater emotional instability and be more prone to depressive thinking patterns, particularly when comparing themselves to idealized online representations of others.

Despite these risks, research suggests that intervention is possible. Hunt et al. (2018) conducted an experimental study demonstrating that reducing social media use to 10 minutes per platform per day significantly decreased depression and loneliness among undergraduate students. This indicates that depressive symptoms linked to digital behaviors are modifiable and that healthier patterns of media use may help improve emotional well-being.

Across these studies, the evidence demonstrates that depression in young adults is shaped by a complex interplay of digital engagement, social comparison, FoMO, emotional vulnerability, and interpersonal factors. Depression both drives and is intensified by problematic online behaviors, creating self-reinforcing cycles that make

young adults particularly susceptible to emotional distress in digitally saturated environments. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing interventions and promoting healthier digital habits to support the psychological well-being of young adults.

1.4 THE CORRELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF FOMO, SOCIAL COMPARISON AND DEPRESSION

The psychological relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression represents one of the most widely examined triads in contemporary digital psychology. These three constructs do not function in isolation; instead, they form a dynamic, mutually reinforcing system that significantly shapes emotional well-being, especially among adolescents and young adults. Evidence across various empirical studies indicates that FoMO increases social comparison, social comparison amplifies depressive symptoms, and depression in turn heightens susceptibility to FoMO and excessive social media use. This reciprocal system illustrates how digital environments trigger cognitive and emotional patterns that can escalate into psychological distress.

A foundational aspect of this dynamic is the role of social comparison as a core mechanism linking FoMO to depression. Burnell et al. (2019) demonstrated that passive social media browsing heightened both social comparison and FoMO, which subsequently predicted increased depressive symptoms, reduced physical appearance satisfaction, and lower social acceptance. This finding indicates that FoMO is not merely a fear of exclusion—it is closely tied to how individuals evaluate themselves relative to peers' highlight reels online. When individuals perceive others as more socially active, successful, or fulfilled, they experience emotional discomfort, which can evolve into depressive tendencies.

The correlational chain becomes even clearer when FoMO is understood as a predictor of increased social comparison tendencies. Several studies show that individuals high in FoMO are more likely to monitor what others are doing online, increasing exposure to comparison-inducing content. For instance, Servidio et al. (2024) found that FoMO predicted social comparison tendencies, which then contributed to problematic social media use and decreased self-esteem. Young adults

who constantly check social media out of fear of being left out inevitably encounter content that invites upward comparison, intensifying emotional vulnerability and depressive affect.

Research has also confirmed that FoMO contributes indirectly to depression through behavioral and emotional mediators. Steinberger & Kim (2023) showed that FoMO indirectly predicted depression via problematic social media use and phubbing behavior. Individuals who fear missing out repeatedly engage with their phones to remain socially updated, often neglecting real-life interactions, which heightens loneliness and depressive symptoms. Malik et al. (2025) likewise found that FoMO predicted emotional exhaustion among youth, a state closely tied to depressive experiences. These findings show that FoMO triggers behaviors and cognitions that ultimately increase depressive outcomes through heightened comparison, withdrawal from offline relationships, and emotional fatigue.

Social comparison itself is strongly correlated with depressive symptoms, acting as both a mediator and independent predictor. Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) found that social comparison, along with loneliness, mediated the link between FoMO and lower subjective well-being among adolescents. This indicates that comparison is the psychological channel through which FoMO transforms into emotional distress. When individuals compare their achievements, appearance, relationships, or social engagement to idealized portrayals online, they often perceive themselves as lacking, contributing to sadness, low self-esteem, and depressive symptomatology.

Another layer of the correlation emerges when considering depression as a driver of both FoMO and social comparison. Sommantico et al. (2023) found that depressive symptoms predicted increased FoMO and social media addiction, with low self-esteem functioning as a mediator. This suggests that depressed individuals may engage more frequently in comparison or monitoring behaviors online due to insecurities or a desire for reassurance. However, these behaviors often worsen depressive symptoms, creating a cyclical pattern in which depression feeds the very behaviors that intensify it.

Reer et al. (2019) also provided evidence that individuals experiencing anxiety, loneliness, or depression are more prone to engage with social media in comparison-

oriented ways. Their findings showed that social comparison orientation and FoMO jointly mediated the relationship between decreased psychosocial well-being and increased social media use. This demonstrates how existing depressive symptoms predispose individuals to social comparison and FoMO, further deepening emotional distress.

Digital behavior studies also establish that the FoMO–comparison–depression triad is strengthened by online environments designed to promote engagement. Dinh and Lee (2025) found that social media exposure increased upward comparison and FoMO, which led to increased social media self-presentation motivations. These motivations, often rooted in appearance- or status-based evaluations, have been associated with depressive symptoms when individuals perceive that they do not measure up to socially constructed standards. Similarly, akbari et al. (2021)showed that social comparison mediated the relationship between smartphone addiction and phubbing, behaviors associated with loneliness and depressive tendencies. These findings reinforce how digital interactions amplify psychological vulnerabilities and create reinforcing loops.

Another important aspect of the correlational dynamics is the role of daily emotional fluctuations. Adams (2021) found that daily changes in FoMO were associated with increased depression and upward social comparison. This highlights that the FoMO–comparison–depression cycle is not merely a long-term pattern but also occurs at a micro-level, fluctuating based on specific online exposures throughout the day. Young adults may experience momentary spikes in depressive feelings when encountering posts that trigger comparison or exclusion-related thoughts.

Self-concept clarity also plays a role in this dynamic. Servidio et al. (2021) found that individuals with low self-concept clarity experienced higher FoMO and social comparison, which subsequently predicted problematic smartphone use. Because low self-concept clarity is strongly associated with depressive symptoms, individuals already struggling with identity-related concerns may be more likely to enter the FoMO-comparison-depression cycle.

The interrelationships between FoMO, social comparison, and depression form a self-reinforcing loop:

1. FoMO increases social comparison
2. Social comparison increases depressive symptoms
3. Depression increases FoMO and comparison tendencies
4. These behaviors increase problematic digital use
5. Digital use exposes individuals to more comparison-inducing content
6. The cycle intensifies

Hunt et al. (2018) offered evidence for this cyclical model by finding that reducing social media use significantly reduced both depressive symptoms and FoMO. This suggests that FoMO and social comparison serve as mechanisms through which excessive digital exposure contributes to depression and that intervening in these processes can alleviate emotional distress.

1.5 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is grounded in psychological theories and empirical evidence explaining how digital engagement influences emotional well-being among young adults. The study specifically examines the interplay between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression within the context of social networking site (SNS) usage.

The framework of this study is primarily based on:

1. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan explains that individuals possess three fundamental psychological needs:

* Autonomy

* Competence

* Relatedness

When these needs are not adequately fulfilled, individuals may experience insecurity, loneliness, and emotional distress. Social networking sites often intensify these unmet needs by constantly exposing users to others' achievements, relationships, and experiences. This increases Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), encourages social comparison, and may ultimately contribute to depressive symptoms.

According to SDT, individuals with lower satisfaction of psychological needs are more vulnerable to compulsive social media engagement and emotional difficulties.

2. Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory proposed by Leon Festinger states that individuals evaluate their abilities, achievements, and self-worth by comparing themselves with others.

In digital environments, social networking sites provide continuous exposure to carefully curated and idealized representations of others' lives. Such exposure promotes upward social comparison, where individuals compare themselves with people perceived as more successful, attractive, or socially fulfilled.

Frequent upward comparison may lead to:

* Feelings of inadequacy

* Low self-esteem

* Dissatisfaction

* Emotional distress

* Depression

This theory explains how social media platforms strengthen comparison tendencies among young adults.

3. Cognitive-Behavioral Perspective

The cognitive-behavioral perspective suggests that repeated negative thoughts and maladaptive interpretations influence emotional well-being. Young adults who constantly monitor social media may develop distorted beliefs such as:

"Others are happier than me"

"I am missing important experiences"

"My life is less successful"

These cognitions increase FoMO and social comparison tendencies, which may further intensify depressive symptoms.

Conceptual Relationship Among Variables

The theoretical framework proposes that:

1. Excessive engagement with social networking sites increases Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).
2. Higher FoMO increases social comparison tendencies.
3. Frequent upward social comparison contributes to depressive symptoms.
4. Depression may further increase dependence on social media, creating a cyclical relationship.

Thus, FoMO, social comparison, and depression operate as interconnected psychological mechanisms within digital environments.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study is stated as: "An Investigation into the Interplay between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Comparison, and Depression among Young Adults: An Empirical Perspective."

1.7 OPERATIONAL DEFINATION OF THE STUDY

FOMO: A pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, measured using the FoMO Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Social Comparison: The tendency to evaluate one's abilities and circumstances relative to others on social media, measured using the INCOM (Gibbons &Buunk, 1999).

Depression: A mood disorder marked by persistent sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest, measured using the BDI-II (Beck et al., 1996).

Young Adults: Individuals aged 18–25 years from Jammu district who use social networking sites regularly.DE

1.8 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to address key gaps identified in contemporary research on digital-era mental health. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To assess the prevalence of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) , Social comparison and Depression in young adults.
2. To explore the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) , social comparison and depression among young adults
3. To explore the difference in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among male and female young adults
4. To explore the differences in social comparison among male and female young adults
5. To explore the difference in depression among male and female young adults

1.9 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) , Social Comparison and Depression among young adults.

$H0_2$: There is no significant gender based difference in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among male and female young adults.

$H0_3$: There is no significant gender based difference in Social Comparison among male and female young adults.

$H0_4$: There is no significant gender based difference in Depression among male and female young adults

1.10 DELIMITATIONS:

- The study is delimited to young adults aged 18-25 years enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs within Jammu District
- The research employs a cross–sectional correlational design using self-report measures, which delimits the ability to establish casual relationships.

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Studying the interplay between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression among young adults is important as it helps understand how digital engagement and comparison based behaviors affect emotional well-being. This knowledge can guide the development of interventions that reduce FoMO, promote healthy social media use, and strengthen self-esteem and emotional resilience. By identifying how FoMO and social comparison contribute to depressive symptoms, the study can support mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in designing programs that foster balanced technology use and enhance psychological well-being among young adults.

CHAPTER-II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature forms a crucial foundation for any research study, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings related to the variables under investigation. In the present study, the review focuses on three key psychological constructs, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression and examines their interrelationships within the context of young adults' digital engagement.

The present review systematically examines previous studies conducted across different cultural contexts to understand the prevalence, predictors, consequences, and interrelationships of these constructs. It also highlights key psychological mechanisms, mediators, and moderators identified in prior research. By synthesizing these findings, the review aims to identify research gaps and provide a strong conceptual and empirical base for the current study.

Zheng et al. (2025) examined how interpersonal curiosity contributes to social media–induced FoMO among university students. Findings showed that curiosity significantly predicted FoMO, and this link was partially mediated by passive engagement with short-video platforms and upward social comparison. The study highlights that FoMO arises not only from interest in others' activities but also from passive browsing habits and tendency to compare oneself with others, emphasizing key psychological pathways behind FoMO.

Tandon et al. (2025) examined how Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and different forms of envy contribute to compulsive social networking site (SNS) use. Using data from 330 U.S. SNS users and PLS-SEM analysis, they found that FoMO significantly predicted both benign and malicious envy, as well as expected envy. Benign and expected envy were linked to SNS stalking and self-disclosure, which in turn predicted compulsive SNS use. The study highlights FoMO-driven envy as a key pathway to problematic SNS engagement.

Dinh and Lee (2025) conducted a survey of 367 U.S. social media users to examine how social media exposure predicts online self-presentation desire. Using PLS-SEM, they found that greater exposure increased upward social comparison and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), both of which motivated stronger self-presentation behaviors. The study also showed that network type moderated these effects, with friend-dominated and stranger-dominated networks influencing users differently. The findings highlight social comparison and FoMO as key psychological drivers of online self-presentation.

Piko et al. (2025) explored psychological contributors to Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among university students, focusing on variables involving self-evaluation. Using an online survey of 255 Hungarian students aged 18–35, the study examined the roles of social comparison, social media addiction, perfectionism, and loneliness. The findings indicated that these factors were significant predictors of FoMO, suggesting that higher social comparison tendencies, addictive social media use, loneliness, and perfectionistic traits contribute meaningfully to elevated FoMO levels.

Malik et al. (2025) explored psychosocial predictors of FoMO among Malaysian youth and found that social comparison, phubbing, and loneliness significantly predicted FoMO and emotional exhaustion. Their PLS-SEM analysis confirmed that FoMO functions within a larger psychosocial framework contributing to depressive symptoms.

Kumar and Kumar. (2024) investigated compulsive social media use and its influence on impulsive buying among Indian youth. FoMO and social comparison mediated this link, while high self- esteem mitigated the effects. The study expanded FoMO research into consumer behavior, emphasizing digital comparison's economic and emotional consequences.

Steinberger & Kim (2023) analyzed data from 379 Indian young adults and found FoMO's negative effects on mental health were mediated by problematic social media use and phubbing. Their serial mediation model confirmed that FoMO indirectly contributes to depression through maladaptive digital habits.

Dinh and Lee (2024) examined how social media influencers (SMIs) shape followers' conspicuous consumption through psychological mediators. Using data from 272

MTurk respondents, the study found that exposure to SMIs increases social comparison, fear of missing out (FoMO), and materialistic tendencies, which collectively drive conspicuous purchasing. The desire to mimic influencers further strengthened this effect. Their Intrinsic–Extrinsic Consumption Motivation Model offers a new framework explaining how SMIs influence consumer behavior.

Servidio et al. (2024) explored how Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) contributes to problematic social media use (PSMU) through psychological mechanisms. Surveying 256 Italian university students, they found that FoMO positively predicted both social comparison and PSMU, while being negatively related to self-esteem. Social comparison and self-esteem acted as sequential mediators, showing that FoMO increases PSMU partly by heightening comparison tendencies and lowering self-esteem.

Kumar and Kumar (2024) examined how compulsive social media use influences impulsive and compulsive buying among young Indian adults. Guided by compensatory internet use and social comparison theories, the study found that social comparison and FoMO significantly mediate the link between compulsive media use and unrestrained buying. Individuals who compare themselves more or fear missing out are more prone to excessive purchasing, while higher self-esteem weakens these effects, indicating a protective role.

Çifçi and Kumcağız (2023) investigated whether social comparison and loneliness mediate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and subjective well-being (SWB) in adolescents. Using a relational survey design and a large stratified sample of 1,000 adolescents, the study found that higher FoMO was associated with lower SWB, reduced self-worth, andgreater loneliness. Structural equation modeling showed that both social comparison and loneliness significantly mediated the FoMO–SWB relationship, highlighting their crucial roles in adolescents' emotional well-being.

Steinberger and Kim (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study with 296 participants to examine how subjective well-being (SWB) relates to social network site (SNS) addiction. Findings showed that social comparison and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) jointly mediated this relationship. Importantly, social comparison of ability (SCA),

but not social comparison of opinion (SCO), uniquely mediated the SWB–SNS addiction link. The study highlighted that ability-based comparisons evoke stronger negative emotions, making them a key pathway through which FOMO contributes to SNS addiction.

Sommantico et al. (2023) explored how depression, FoMO, online FoMO, and self-esteem relate to social media addiction among Italian young adults. Results showed that depression increased FoMO and social media addiction, while self-esteem was negatively linked to both. Self-esteem also mediated the relationship between depression and social media addiction, indicating that lower self-worth heightens vulnerability. The study further found that younger women reported higher FoMO and addiction levels, highlighting important risk groups.

Parveiz et al. (2023) investigated the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and social media addiction in young adults using a sample of 200 participants aged 18 and above. The study found significant positive associations among all three variables, indicating that higher FoMO and greater social comparison tendencies predicted increased social media addiction. Additionally, the researchers reported a significant gender difference in FoMO, suggesting that young adult males and females experience FoMO differently.

Wang et al. (2023) investigated how upward social comparison on social networking sites contributes to digital hoarding behavior. In a survey of 556 SNS users, the study found that greater upward comparison increased digital hoarding, and this relationship was mediated by Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Additionally, dispositional greed strengthened both the comparison–FoMO link and the FoMO–hoarding link. The findings highlight FoMO and greed as key psychological mechanisms underlying digital hoarding in the digital age.

Sommantico et al. (2023) conducted an intervention-based study where 55 college students were trained to reduce social comparison on social media. Participants showed modest improvements in psychological well-being, especially those initially high in comparison tendencies. The study underscored that managing online comparisons can improve emotional regulation.

Bajwa et al.(2023) conducted a study on smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior among university students, using a sample of 794 participants. The study explored how fear of missing out (FoMO), social comparison, and loneliness act as mediators and moderators in the relationship between smartphone addiction and phubbing. The findings revealed that individuals with higher levels of smartphone addiction were more likely to engage in phubbing, especially when influenced by FoMO and social comparison tendencies. Moreover, loneliness intensified these effects, indicating that emotional and psychological factors play a significant role in digital dependency behaviors.This study emphasizes the complex psychological mechanisms underlying smartphone overuse and highlights the importance of addressing FoMO and loneliness to reduce problematic social media and smartphone behaviors.

Wolniewicz et al. (2021) developed the FoMO-Content Scale (FoMO-C) to measure online information-related FoMO. Findings indicated that FoMO-C significantly predicted problematic smartphone use and negative affect beyond general FoMO measures, enhancing precision in assessing FoMO's digital impact.

Fioravanti et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis examining the link between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social networking site (SNS) use, and problematic SNS use. Analyzing 33 samples totaling 21,473 participants, the study found strong positive associations between FoMO and both SNS use and compulsive SNS behaviors. FoMO also correlated positively with depression, anxiety, and neuroticism, confirming FoMO as a key psychological driver of excessive online engagement.

Akbari et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examining the association between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and internet use. Analyzing 86 effect sizes from over 55,000 participants, they found FoMO to be consistently linked with higher internet use, with associations ranging from weak to strong. The COVID-19 pandemic strengthened this relationship. However, FoMO showed no clear interaction with mental health symptoms, underscoring the complexity of FoMO-driven internet behaviors.

Gupta and Sharma (2021) provided a comprehensive review outlining the origins, theoretical foundations, and mental health implications of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Although not based on an empirical sample, the review synthesized research

showing that FoMO involves both the perception of missing out and compulsive social connection-seeking. The authors highlighted links between FoMO and poor mental health, impaired social functioning, sleep problems, reduced academic performance, and problematic social media use. They also emphasized CBT-based interventions as effective treatment options.

Servidio et al. (2021) examined whether social comparison orientation and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) sequentially mediate the link between self-concept clarity (SCC) and problematic smartphone use (PSU). Using a sample of 474 Italian adults and structural equation modeling, the study found that lower SCC significantly predicted higher PSU.This relationship was partially mediated by greater social comparison tendencies and increased FoMO, identifying both as key proximal psychological factors contributing to PSU within the I-PACE model.

Adams (2021) studied 50 undergraduates and found that daily fluctuations in FoMO correlated with increased anxiety, depression, and upward social comparison. The use of daily diary and multilevel modeling revealed that FoMO exerts short-term but strong effects on emotional states, demonstrating its day-to-day variability.

Barry and Wong (2020) explored whether FoMO is a generational trend or an individual trait across four U.S. age cohorts. The study found no generational differences in overall FoMO or FoMO related to friends and family. Instead, FoMO was strongly linked to individual factors, particularly low self-esteem and loneliness. These associations were amplified for individuals with high social media engagement, suggesting FoMO is less about age and more about personal vulnerabilities.

Fabris et al. (2020) examined 472 Italian adolescents and found that high FoMO levels increased emotional distress through online neglect and social media addiction. The study provided evidence that FoMO indirectly influences emotional well-being via digital stress and dependency, emphasizing its role as a mediator in social media–related emotional challenges.

Reer et al. (2019) conducted a survey study using a large representative German sample aged 14–39 to examine how decreases in psychosocial well-being relate to social media engagement (SME). The findings showed that loneliness, anxiety, and depression were positively associated with higher SME. Social comparison

orientation (SCO) and fear of missing out (FoMO) jointly mediated these relationships, with higher SCO linked to increased FoMO, identifying high-SCO individuals as particularly vulnerable.

Burnell et al. (2019) examined how social comparison and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) mediate the relationship between passive social networking site (SNS) use and well-being. Using a diverse sample of 717 college students, the study found that passive SNS use increased social comparison, which then heightened FoMO. FoMO subsequently predicted more depressive symptoms and lower self-worth, physical appearance satisfaction, and social acceptance. The results highlight social comparison and FoMO as key mechanisms linking passive browsing to poorer well-being.

Alt and Boniel-Nissim (2018) examined how adolescents' learning approaches relate to FoMO and problematic internet use (PIU). Findings showed that surface learning was positively associated with FoMO and PIU, while FoMO also mediated the link between surface learning and PIU. The study suggests that low self-regulation may underlie both FoMO and surface learning tendencies. Enhancing students' self-regulation skills could reduce FoMO and help prevent problematic internet use in educational contexts.

Hunt et al. (2018) experimentally demonstrated that limiting social media use (to 10 minutes per platform per day) led to significant reductions in loneliness and depression among undergraduates. This was among the first causal studies linking reduced social media exposure with lower FoMO and improved mental health.

Wang et al. (2018) investigated how social networking addiction contributes to adolescent depression through FoMO and self-esteem. Results revealed that FoMO and social comparison mediated the relationship between social media use and depressive outcomes, with self-esteem acting as a buffer. This study highlighted self-esteem as a critical moderating factor in digital mental health.

Oberst et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study among 1,359 Spanish adolescents and distinguished two types of FoMO—related to social events and to social information. Both predicted increased negative affect and addictive social networking.

This research highlighted how FoMO functions as a mechanism for emotional distress and compulsive online behavior.

Buglass et al. (2017) explored FoMO's motivational roots using data from 300 young adults. They found that individuals with lower psychological need satisfaction exhibited greater FoMO, which predicted compulsive social media use and social comparison. The study situated FoMO within Self-Determination Theory and emphasized its mediating role in problematic online behaviors.

Steers et al. (2014) examined Facebook use among 236 undergraduates and found that viewing others' "highlight reels" on social media heightened feelings of inferiority and depressive symptoms. FoMO was identified as a key mediator between social comparison and emotional distress. The study provided early empirical evidence of how SNS exposure contributes to negative affect through FoMO-driven comparisons.

The review of literature indicates that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression are closely interconnected psychological constructs that significantly influence the emotional well-being of young adults in the digital era. Previous studies consistently revealed that excessive social media use increases FoMO and encourages upward social comparison, where individuals compare themselves with others' achievements, lifestyles, and experiences. Such comparison tendencies often lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, low self-esteem, emotional distress, and depressive symptoms. Research further suggests that FoMO acts as an important psychological mechanism linking problematic social media use with depression and emotional vulnerability. Several studies also highlighted the role of factors such as self-esteem, loneliness, self-concept clarity, and unmet psychological needs in strengthening these relationships. The reviewed literature across different cultural contexts consistently supports the existence of a reciprocal relationship among FoMO, social comparison, and depression. Overall, the literature emphasizes that digital environments and continuous online comparison negatively affect the psychological well-being of young adults and increase their vulnerability to emotional and mental health problems.

2.1 RESEARCH GAP

1. Previous studies have mainly focused on social media use and mental health separately, while limited research has examined the combined relationship among FoMO, social comparison, and depression together.

2. Very few studies have been conducted in the Indian context, especially among young adults from Jammu district, making localized research necessary.

3. Existing research has focused more on problematic social media use and smartphone addiction, with less attention given to the psychological mechanisms linking FoMO, social comparison, and depression.

4. Findings regarding gender differences in FoMO, social comparison, and depression remain inconsistent, indicating the need for further investigation among young adults.

CHAPTER-III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER-III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a systematic and scientific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data to achieve the objectives of a study. It provides the overall framework that guides the researcher in conducting the investigation in a structured and reliable manner. A well-defined methodology helps ensure the accuracy, validity, and credibility of research findings.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study used a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression among young adults. Data were collected at one point in time using standardized psychological scales. The study aimed to assess the prevalence of these variables, explore their interrelationships, and examine gender differences among young adults.

The study targeted young adults aged 18–25 enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs within Jammu District. Participants were recruited from multiple colleges to ensure diversity across academic disciplines. In alignment with the reviewed literature, an estimated sample size of 120 respondents were deemed adequate for achieving statistical power and generalizability in correlational analyses

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of the present study consisted of young adults aged 18–25 years enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs and residing in Jammu district. From this population, a sample of 123 young adults was selected through convenience sampling from different colleges and universities of Jammu district for the purpose of data collection and analysis.

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Age range from 18-25 yrs.
- Enrolled in undergraduate and post graduate programme.
- Voluntarily willing to participate.
- Residing in Jammu district only.

3.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Age range below 18 yrs .
- Not willing to participate.
- Residing outside Jammu district.
- Not enrolled in undergraduate or post graduate programme.

3.3 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

A purposive sampling method was employed.

3.4 RESEARCH TOOLS USED AND ITS DESCRIPTION

3.4.1 Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013): A 10-item validated instrument assessing apprehension about missing rewarding experiences, designed for young adult SNS users. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale; higher totals indicate elevated FoMO. The scale demonstrates robust reliability across digital contexts (Oberst et al., 2017; Wolniewicz et al., 2021).

3.4.2 Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999): An 11-item scale gauging the extent and frequency of social comparison across various life domains, especially relevant in digital and academic environments. Participants rank statements on a five-point Likert scale. The tool is extensively used and has high psychometric validity (Steers et al., 2014; Buglass et al., 2017).

3.4.3 Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (Beck et al., 1996): A standardized, 21-item self-report instrument measuring depressive symptom severity. Each item offers four graded options summarizing recent affective and cognitive experiences. Higher summed scores represent greater depression risk. The BDI-II is internationally recognized and extensively validated among young adults (Hunt et al., 2018; Fabris et al., 2020).

3.5 STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE EMPLOYED

To analyze the data, the investigator used the following statistical technique

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- t-test
- Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation

CHAPTER-IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter presents the findings of the study examining the relationship among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), depression, and social comparison among social media users. The data were collected from a sample of 123 participants and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). The results are organized in the following sequence: (a) demographic profile of the sample, (b) descriptive statistics indicating the prevalence of the study variables, (c) independent samples t-test results comparing males and females, and (d) Pearson correlation analysis. All tables are presented in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition (APA, 2020).

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Table 4.1 presents the demographic characteristics of the faculty participants, including distribution by gender, age, marital status, type of institution and year of experience.

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of the Sample (N = 123)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender			
	Male	84	68.3
	Female	39	31.7
Age Group			
	Below 20 years	11	8.9
	20–30 years	88	71.5
	Above 30 years	24	19.5
Educational Qualification			
	Undergraduate	9	7.3
	Graduate	64	52.0
	Postgraduate	50	40.7

Area of Residence			
	Urban	99	80.5
	Rural	24	19.5

***Note*.** Gender was coded as 1 = Male and 2 = Female. Age groups were coded as 1 = Below 20 years, 2 = 20–30 years, and 3 = Above 30 years. Educational qualification was coded as 1 = Undergraduate, 2 = Graduate, and 3 = Postgraduate. Area of residence was coded as 1 = Urban and 2 = Rural.

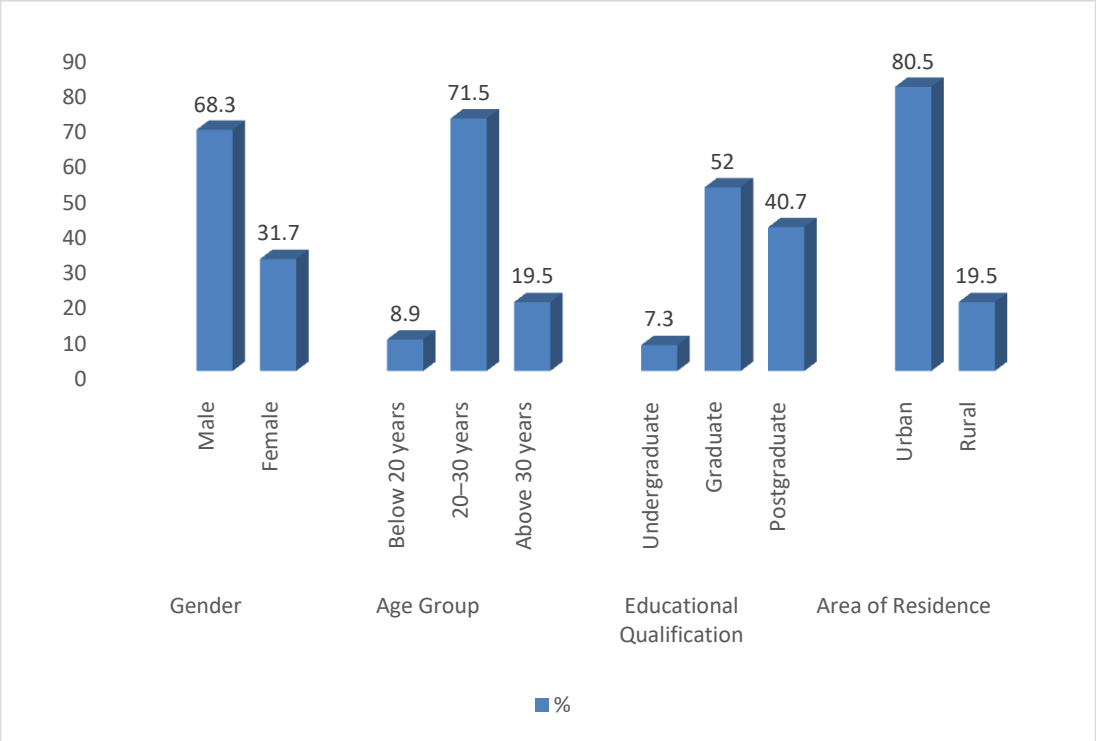


Figure 4.1

Demographic details of participants

The demographic characteristics of the 123 participants are summarized in Table 4.1. The sample comprised a majority of male participants (n = 84, 68.3%) and female participants (n = 39, 31.7%). This unequal gender distribution reflects the accessibility-based sampling approach utilized in this study, where male respondents were proportionally more available and willing to participate.

With respect to age, the majority of participants were within the 20–30 years age range (n = 88, 71.5%), followed by those above 30 years (n = 24, 19.5%), and those below 20 years (n = 11, 8.9%). This distribution suggests that the study predominantly captured young adults, a demographic that is prolific in social media use and thus particularly relevant to the study's focus.

In terms of educational qualification, graduate-level participants constituted the largest group (n = 64, 52.0%), followed by postgraduates (n = 50, 40.7%) and undergraduates (n = 9, 7.3%). With respect to area of residence, the vast majority of participants were from urban areas (n = 99, 80.5%), while 19.5% (n = 24) were from rural areas. The urban-heavy composition of the sample is consistent with the higher rates of internet and social media access in urban settings.

4.2 PREVALENCE OF STUDY VARIABLES: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

To examine the prevalence of FOMO, Depression and Social Comparison among the college students sample, frequency distributions were computed for each dimension using established categorical cut offs. For the FOMO, participants were classified into Low, Moderate-low, Moderate-high and High categories for each subscale. For Depression, participants were similarly classified based on score distributions. Results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Prevalence of FOMO, Depression and Social Comparison among College Students

Variable	Category	F	%age
FOMO	Low	43	35
	Moderate-low	67	54.5
	Moderate-high	8	6.5
	High	5	4.1
Depression	Mild	22	17.9
	Minimal	54	43.9
	Moderate	22	17.9
	Severe	25	20.3
Social Comparison	High	5	4.1
	Moderate	112	91.1
	Low	6	4.9

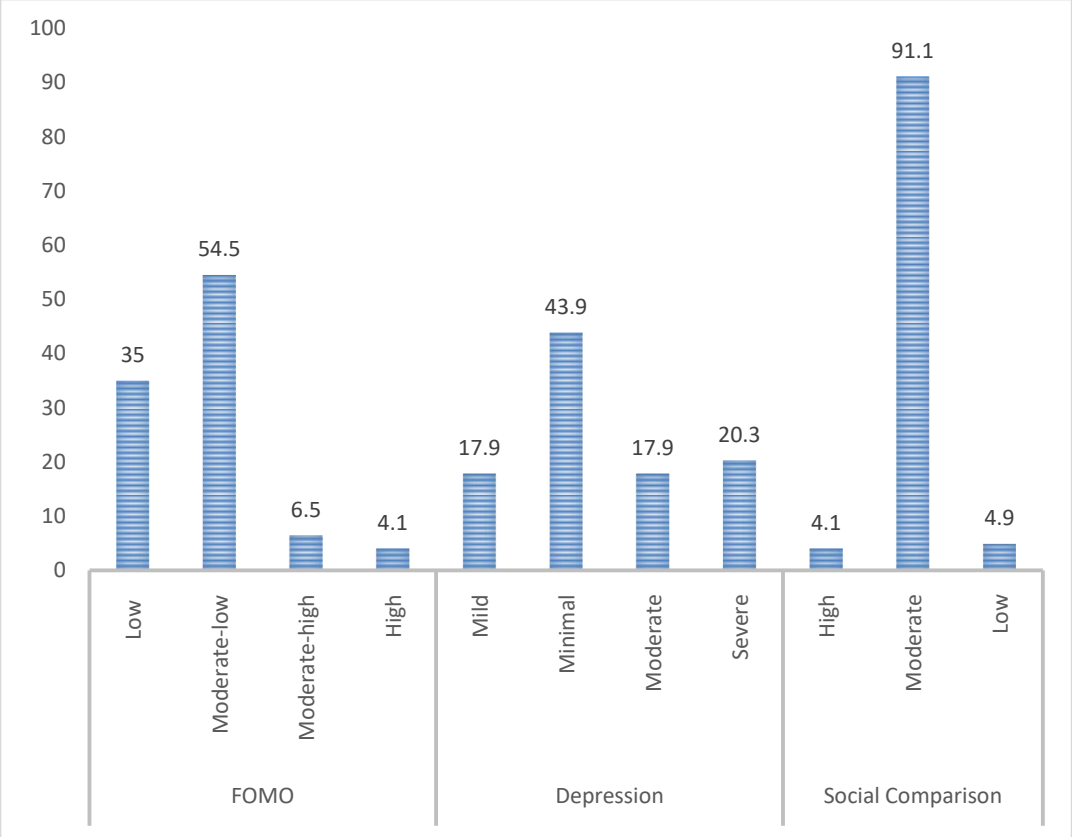


Figure 4.2

Prevalence of FOMO, Depression and Social Comparison among college students

The descriptive statistics provide an overall picture of the prevalence and distribution of the key study variables within the sample. The mean score for fear of missing out (FOMO) was relatively low (M = 2.31, SD = 0.80) on a 5-point scale, indicating that, on average, participants did not strongly experience feelings of missing out, although the full range of scores suggests that some individuals did report high levels. In contrast, the mean depression score (M = 17.54, SD = 13.73), assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory-II, falls within the mild range of depressive symptoms, pointing toward the presence of noticeable psychological distress among participants, with substantial variability indicating that some individuals experienced more severe symptoms. Additionally, the mean score for social comparison (M = 2.74, SD = 0.49) reflects a moderate tendency among participants to compare themselves with others, with relatively low variability suggesting that this behavior was fairly consistent across the sample. Taken together, these findings suggest that while FOMO levels were generally low, moderate social comparison tendencies and mild depressive symptoms were present, highlighting a complex pattern in which consistent

comparison behaviors may coexist with varying levels of emotional distress among individuals.

4.3 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOMO, DEPRESSION, AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether males and females differed significantly on FOMO, depression, and social comparison scores. Prior to conducting the t-test, Levene's test for equality of variances was performed to determine whether the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. Results indicated that variances were not significantly different across gender groups for any of the three variables (all $p > .05$), thereby supporting the use of the equal variances assumed row for all comparisons. Results are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Males and Females on FOMO, Depression, and Social Comparison

	Male (n = 84)		Female (n = 39)					
Variable	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**P**	**D**
FOMO	2.31	0.82	2.30	0.77	.04	121	.970	.007
Depression	17.19	13.27	18.13	14.77	−.35	121	.726	−.068
Social Comparison	2.73	0.48	2.75	0.52	−.21	121	.832	−.041

***Note*.** FOMO = Fear of Missing Out; Social Comparison = Total Social Comparison score. Cohen's d was computed using pooled standard deviation. Equal variances were assumed based on Levene's test (all $p > .05$). A two-tailed test was used with $\alpha = .05$.

The table examines gender differences in FOMO, depression, and social comparison revealesno statistically significant differences between male and female participants across any of the three variables. Male participants ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.82$) and female participants ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.77$) reported nearly identical mean scores on FOMO, $t(121) = 0.04$, $p = .970$, with an extremely small effect size (Cohen's $d = .007$), indicating a negligible influence of gender on FOMO levels.

Similarly, although female participants (M = 18.13, SD = 14.77) reported slightly higher mean scores on depression compared to male participants (M = 17.19, SD = 13.27), this difference was not statistically significant, $t(121) = –0.35$, $p = .726$, $d = –.068$. Based on Beck Depression Inventory-II classification, both groups fall within the mild range of depressive symptoms, further indicating that depression levels were comparable across genders.

For social comparison, male (M = 2.73, SD = 0.48) and female participants (M = 2.75, SD = 0.52) again demonstrated nearly identical scores, with a non-significant result, $t(121) = –0.21$, $p = .832$, and a negligible effect size ($d = –.041$).

Overall, the findings consistently demonstrate that gender does not play a significant role in influencing levels of FOMO, depressive symptoms, or social comparison within the present sample, as evidenced by non-significant *p*-values and trivial effect sizes across all comparisons.

4.4 CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

The correlational analysis was conducted to examine the nature and direction of relationships among fear of missing out (FOMO), depression, social comparison, and age using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients. The findings provide important insight into how these psychological constructs are associated within the present sample. A statistically significant positive correlation was observed between FOMO and social comparison (r = .239, p = .008), indicating that individuals who reported higher levels of fear of missing out also tended to engage more frequently in social comparison behaviors. Although the strength of this relationship can be considered modest, its statistical significance suggests a meaningful association, implying that individuals who feel a stronger need to stay constantly updated about others' activities may be more inclined to evaluate themselves in relation to others, particularly in the context of social media. This pattern aligns with the idea that FOMO may act as a motivational factor driving individuals to monitor and compare their lives with those of their peers, potentially reinforcing comparison-oriented thinking.

In contrast, the relationship between FOMO and depression was found to be positive but extremely weak and statistically non-significant ($r = .024$, $p = .792$). The near-zero magnitude of the correlation indicates that there is virtually no linear association between these two variables in the present sample. This suggests that experiencing fear of missing out does not necessarily correspond to higher levels of depressive symptoms. Despite theoretical expectations and prior research suggesting a link between excessive social media engagement, FOMO, and negative emotional outcomes, the current findings do not provide empirical support for such a relationship. One possible explanation for this result could be that participants may experience FOMO in a relatively mild or situational manner that does not translate into persistent emotional distress. Additionally, other moderating or mediating variables—such as coping strategies, personality traits, or social support—may influence whether FOMO contributes to depressive symptomatology.

Similarly, the relationship between depression and social comparison was found to be negative and non-significant ($r = -.069$, $p = .449$). Although the direction of the correlation suggests that higher levels of social comparison may be associated with slightly lower levels of depressive symptoms, the relationship is extremely weak and lacks statistical significance. This indicates that, within this sample, engaging in social comparison does not meaningfully relate to individuals' levels of depression. This finding is somewhat inconsistent with commonly held assumptions that frequent comparison, particularly upward comparison on social media, may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and depressive affect. However, it is possible that the type or context of social comparison (e.g., upward vs. downward comparison) was not differentiated in this study, which may have influenced the results. Additionally, individuals may interpret or respond to comparison differently, with some deriving motivation or reassurance rather than distress.

Overall, the findings from the correlational analysis highlight a selective pattern of relationships among the study variables. The only statistically significant association observed was between FOMO and social comparison, suggesting that these constructs are meaningfully linked and may operate together in shaping individuals' social media experiences. In contrast, depression did not show significant associations with either FOMO or social comparison, indicating that depressive symptoms may be

influenced by other factors not captured in the present analysis. Additionally, age was not found to be a significant correlate of any of the variables, further emphasizing the limited role of demographic factors in this context. Taken together, these results suggest that while certain cognitive and behavioral tendencies such as social comparison are related to FOMO, their connection to emotional outcomes like depression may be more complex and influenced by additional psychological or contextual variables.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the bivariate relationships among FOMO, depression, social comparison, and age. The results are presented in Table 4. A significance threshold of $p < .05$ (two-tailed) was used for all tests.

Table 4.4

Pearson Correlations Among FOMO, Depression, Social Comparison, and Age (N = 123)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. FOMO	2.31	0.80	—			
2. Depression	17.54	13.73	.024	—		
3. Social Comparison	2.74	0.49	.239**	−.069	—	

Note. FOMO = Fear of Missing Out; Depression was measured using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II); Social Comparison = Total Social Comparison score. Age was measured categorically (1 = Below 20 years, 2 = 20–30 years, 3 = Above 30 years); therefore, M and SD are not applicable. Dashes (—) indicate self-correlations.

**p < .01 (two-tailed).

4.5 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

In summary, the findings of the present study indicate that (a) the sample was predominantly male, young adult (20–30 years), graduate-level educated, and urban-residing; (b) the average levels of FOMO and social comparison were in the moderate range, while mean depression scores fell in the moderately severe range; (c) no

significant gender differences were found for FOMO, depression, or social comparison, with all effect sizes being negligible; and (d) only one significant bivariate relationship emerged—a positive correlation between FOMO and Social Comparison ($r = .239$, $p = .008$). Neither FOMO nor social comparison were significantly associated with depression in this sample, and age was unrelated to any study variable.

CHAPTER-V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, FUTURE IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTION

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4. The results are interpreted within the context of existing theoretical frameworks and empirical literature on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), depression, and social comparison, particularly in the domain of social media use among young adults. The chapter is organized into sections addressing each major finding, followed by a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, study limitations, recommendations for future research, and a final conclusion.

5.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The present study was conducted with a sample of 123 individuals, the majority of whom were male (68.3%), between the ages of 20 and 30 years (71.5%), held graduate-level educational qualifications (52.0%), and resided in urban areas (80.5%). This demographic profile is consistent with the broader literature on social media research in South Asian contexts, where young, educated, urban adults represent the most active and engaged social media users (Twenge et al., 2018). The predominance of urban participants further aligns with the higher rates of internet penetration and smartphone usage in cities, which facilitate greater social media engagement and, by extension, greater exposure to FOMO-inducing stimuli and social comparison opportunities (Przybylski et al., 2013).

The skewed gender distribution—with approximately twice as many male participants as femalemay reflect recruitment biases inherent in convenience sampling and should be considered when generalizing the findings to female social media users, who often report distinct patterns of social media engagement and psychological vulnerability (Fardouly& Vartanian, 2015).

5.1.1 Prevalence of FOMO, Depression and Social Comparison

The descriptive findings revealed that FOMO was present at a below-moderate level in this sample (M = 2.31, SD = 0.80 on a 5-point scale). This finding suggests that, while participants used social media regularly enough to be eligible for the study, the majority did not experience intensely dysregulated anxiety about missing social experiences. However, the range of scores extending to the scale maximum (5.00) is noteworthy and indicates that a subset of participants experienced marked FOMO, consistent with the proposition of Przybylski et al. (2013) that FOMO is a dispositional trait that varies considerably across individuals.

The mean depression score of 17.54 (SD = 13.73) on the BDI-II is of particular clinical relevance. According to BDI-II scoring guidelines, scores between 14 and 19 indicate mild depression, 20–28 indicate moderate depression, and 29 and above indicate severe depression. Thus, the average score in this sample falls within the mild depression range, suggesting the presence of noticeable but not severe depressive symptoms among participants. This finding is consistent with research linking social media use to increased emotional vulnerability among young adults (Twenge & Campbell, 2019; Vannucci et al., 2017). The high standard deviation (13.73) indicates substantial inter-individual variability, suggesting that while some participants experienced minimal depressive symptoms, others reported moderate to severe levels of depression. This dispersion may partly reflect the heterogeneous nature of social media use patterns across participants.

Social comparison scores were moderate (M = 2.74, SD = 0.49), suggesting a consistent but not extreme tendency to assess oneself relative to others on social media. This finding aligns with Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and its digital-age extensions, which propose that social media platforms, by making others' social lives highly visible, create an environment uniquely conducive to upward social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014). The relatively low standard deviation for this variable, compared to FOMO and depression, suggests that social comparison tendencies were more uniformly distributed across the sample.

5.1.2 Gender Differences in FOMO, Depression and Social Comparison

Contrary to the study's hypotheses, no statistically significant gender differences were observed for FOMO ($p = .970$), depression ($p = .726$), or social comparison ($p = .832$). All effect sizes were negligible ($d < .10$ for all variables), confirming that the observed mean differences were trivially small and unlikely to be practically meaningful. These findings are inconsistent with some prior studies reporting higher FOMO and social comparison among females (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Vogel et al., 2014), but are congruent with other research suggesting that gender differences in FOMO and social comparison are attenuating as social media use becomes normative and nearly universal across genders (Przybylski et al., 2013).

The null finding for gender differences in depression, in particular, warrants attention. Although prior research has generally documented higher rates of depression and emotional distress among females (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001), the present study found essentially identical mean depression scores for males ($M = 17.19$) and females ($M = 18.13$). Based on BDI-II classification, both groups fall within the mild range of depressive symptoms, indicating comparable levels of emotional distress across genders.

From a practical standpoint, the absence of significant gender differences implies that interventions targeting FOMO, depression, and social comparison in social media users need not be heavily gender-differentiated. Both male and female users may benefit equally from universal approaches such as digital literacy education, mindful social media use programs, and awareness campaigns addressing the psychological risks of excessive social comparison online.

5.1.3 Correlation Between FOMO and Social Comparison

The most significant finding of the present study was a statistically significant positive correlation between FOMO and Social Comparison, $r(121) = .239$, $p = .008$. This finding indicates that individuals who experience greater fear of missing out are more likely to engage in social comparison behaviors online. This result supports and extends the theoretical model proposed by Przybylski et al. (2013), which posits that FOMO motivates increased social media monitoring to keep track of what others are doing and experiencing. Such monitoring inherently involves comparing one's own

life circumstances, relationships, and experiences with those of others, reinforcing a cycle of upward social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014).

The finding is also consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which suggests that unmet psychological needs such as the need for belonging and competence—underlie FOMO. Individuals with unmet relational needs may be particularly motivated to scan social media for cues about others' social activities, thereby engaging in frequent social comparison as a mechanism to evaluate whether they are 'keeping up' with their peer groups. This comparison process may, in turn, reinforce FOMO by continuously highlighting perceived discrepancies between one's own experiences and those of others.

While the magnitude of the correlation was modest ($r = .239$), it is important to note that the relationship between FOMO and social comparison may be moderated by additional variables not examined in this study, such as social media platform usage intensity, self-esteem, or attachment style. Future research employing structural equation modeling may more rigorously test the directional and mediated pathways between FOMO, social comparison, and psychological outcomes.

5.1.4 Non-Significant Relationship Between FOMO and Depression

Contrary to widely reported findings in the literature (e.g., Vannucci et al., 2017; Buglass et al., 2017), the present study did not find a significant correlation between FOMO and depression, $r(121) = .024$, $p = .792$. Several explanations may account for this null finding. First, the measurement of FOMO in the present study captured a dispositional tendency rather than actual social media behavior. It is possible that the pathway from FOMO to depression is mediated by behavioral responses (e.g., social media use duration, problematic use patterns) rather than the dispositional tendency itself. Second, the sample's mean FOMO score was relatively low ($M = 2.31$), suggesting that the majority of participants did not experience FOMO at levels sufficient to produce measurable psychological distress.

Third, cross-sectional designs are inherently limited in capturing temporal dynamics; longitudinal studies suggest that the relationship between FOMO and depression may manifest over time rather than as a concurrent association. Finally, the large

variability in depression scores (SD = 13.73) may have introduced noise in the correlation analysis, potentially obscuring a subtle relationship.

5.1.5 Non-Significant Relationship Between Depression and Social Comparison

The non-significant negative correlation between depression and social comparison ($r = -.069$, $p = .449$) also diverged from the hypothesized direction. Prior literature has documented that upward social comparison—comparing oneself unfavorably to others who are perceived to be better off—is associated with lower self-esteem, negative affect, and depressive symptoms (Vogel et al., 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). However, the present study did not differentiate between upward and downward social comparison, measuring only the general frequency and tendency of social comparison behavior. It is conceivable that both upward and downward comparisons are occurring in the sample, and their opposing psychological effects may have cancelled out, producing a near-zero aggregate correlation.

Furthermore, the BDI-II primarily assesses cognitive, affective, and somatic components of depressive symptoms. The psychological processes underlying social comparison—such as self-evaluation, perceived inadequacy, and negative self-referential thinking—may relate more strongly to specific affective dimensions of depression or to constructs such as loneliness and social anxiety that were not assessed in this study.

5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry several theoretical implications. First, the significant FOMO–Social Comparison link lends empirical support to the proposition that FOMO and social comparison are closely intertwined constructs in the social media context, potentially operating as reciprocally reinforcing phenomena. This finding invites theorists to consider FOMO not merely as an antecedent of social media use, but also as a product of ongoing social comparison processes that are activated during social media browsing.

Second, the absence of significant correlations between FOMO, depression, and social comparison with most other variables highlights the complexity of social media's psychological impacts. Rather than straightforward direct effects, the

relationships among these constructs may be moderated by individual difference variables (e.g., self-esteem, neuroticism, attachment style) or mediated by behavioral mechanisms (e.g., passive vs. active social media use, social media use duration). Theoretical models should therefore incorporate these boundary conditions rather than assuming universal main effects.

Third, the null gender differences across all three constructs suggest that contemporary theoretical frameworks may need to reconsider the assumption that female social media users are disproportionately vulnerable to FOMO, depression, and social comparison. As social media norms equalize across genders, the psychological consequences may increasingly converge.

5.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study yield several practical implications for mental health practitioners, educators, and policy makers. Given the mean depression score in the sample (falling within the mild range) and the moderate levels of social comparison, mental health awareness programs in universities and workplaces should be sensitized to the role of social media in amplifying psychological distress. Specifically, psycho education interventions that train individuals to recognize FOMO and its relationship to social comparison may help disrupt the cycle between these two constructs.

Mindfulness-based social media literacy programs represent a promising avenue for intervention. Such programs can equip individuals with the metacognitive awareness to recognize when they are engaging in automatic social comparison while scrolling social media feeds, and to consciously redirect attention away from upward comparisons that may undermine well-being. Digital detox initiatives, scheduled social media-free periods, and encouraging users to curate their social media feeds to limit exposure to idealized content are additional strategies supported by the current evidence base.

For clinical practitioners, the finding that depressive symptoms fall within the mild range for the average participant underscores the importance of routinely screening for depression and social media-related psychological concerns in young adult clients. Practitioners should be attuned to FOMO as a potential contributory factor in clients'

distress, even when direct links to depression are not immediately apparent in cross-sectional data.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations of the present study must be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inferences. The direction of relationships—particularly between FOMO and social comparison—cannot be established from correlational data alone. Longitudinal or experimental designs would be better suited to examining temporal and causal dynamics.

Second, the sample was drawn using convenience sampling from a specific geographic and institutional context, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader populations. The overrepresentation of urban, graduate-level, male participants further restricts the extent to which results can be extrapolated to rural, less-educated, or female social media users.

Third, all measures relied on self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to social desirability bias, recall errors, and response set artifacts. Future research would benefit from supplementing self-report measures with objective behavioral data (e.g., screen time logs, social media usage analytics).

Fourth, the BDI- II used to assess depression is a validated screening tool but is not equivalent to a clinical diagnostic interview. Participants scoring in the moderately severe range on the BDI- II may not meet full diagnostic criteria for a depressive disorder, and the instrument captures symptom severity rather than clinical diagnosis.

Fifth, the study did not differentiate between types of social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, TikTok), patterns of use (passive browsing vs. active posting), or time spent on social media. These behavioral dimensions are likely important moderators of the FOMO–depression and social comparison–depression relationships and represent a significant gap in the present study.

Finally, the relatively small sample size (N = 123) may have limited statistical power to detect small but theoretically meaningful effect sizes, particularly for the gender comparison analyses where only 39 female participants were available.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings and limitations identified above, the following recommendations are offered for future research. First, longitudinal studies should be designed to track changes in FOMO, depression, and social comparison over time, enabling examination of temporal precedence and causal pathways. A diary study design would be particularly suitable for capturing daily fluctuations in FOMO and social comparison behaviors.

Second, future research should employ a larger and more gender-balanced sample, with particular attention to ensuring adequate representation of female participants and individuals from rural backgrounds. This would improve the statistical power to detect gender and residency differences and enhance the generalizability of findings.

Third, future studies should incorporate objective measures of social media use behavior, such as application-level screen time data and social media activity logs. Combining subjective psychological measures with objective behavioral data would provide a more comprehensive picture of the FOMO–social comparison–depression nexus.

Fourth, the role of mediating and moderating variables—including self-esteem, attachment style, neuroticism, social media use intensity, and the distinction between passive and active social media engagement—should be explored. Structural equation modeling would be well-suited for testing complex mediated and moderated relationships among these constructs.

Fifth, platform-specific analyses are warranted. Different social media platforms afford different types of social comparison and FOMO-inducing stimuli (e.g., Instagram's visual emphasis on curated lifestyle content vs. Twitter/X's emphasis on discourse and events). Research that disaggregates social media use by platform would yield more nuanced and actionable insights.

Sixth, intervention research is needed to test the efficacy of FOMO-reduction and social comparison awareness programs in reducing depressive symptoms and improving psychological well-being among social media users. Randomized

controlled trial designs would provide the strongest evidence base for such interventions.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the relationships among Fear of Missing Out, depression, and social comparison among social media users in a sample of 123 participants from Jammu, India. The study yielded four primary findings. First, the sample was predominantly young adult, male, graduate-level educated, and urban-residing. Second, depression scores were in the moderately severe range, while FOMO and social comparison were at moderate levels, collectively suggesting a psychologically meaningful burden of social media-related distress in this population. Third, no significant gender differences were observed for any study variable, indicating that FOMO, depression, and social comparison are experienced similarly across male and female social media users in this sample. Fourth, a significant positive correlation was found between FOMO and Social Comparison, consistent with theoretical models positing that FOMO drives social media monitoring and comparison behaviors.

These findings contribute to the growing empirical literature on the psychological consequences of social media use among young adults. The significant FOMO–Social Comparison association, in particular, highlights an important psychological mechanism through which social media may affect well-being, and points to the need for targeted educational and clinical interventions. While the anticipated FOMO–depression link was not observed in this cross-sectional study, the moderately severe depression levels in the sample underscore the need for continued research and mental health support for social media users. Future research employing longitudinal designs, objective behavioral measures, and broader, more representative samples will be essential for advancing theoretical understanding and informing evidence-based interventions in this domain.

SUMMARY

SUMMARY

The present study investigated the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social comparison, and depression among young adults in Jammu district, with a particular focus on gender differences. The study was conducted using a cross-sectional correlational research design on a sample of 123 undergraduate and postgraduate students selected through convenience sampling from different colleges and universities of Jammu district.

The objectives of the study were to assess the prevalence of FoMO, social comparison, and depression among young adults, examine gender differences in these variables, and explore the relationship among them. Corresponding null hypotheses were formulated regarding the relationships and gender differences among the study variables.

Data were collected using standardized psychological tools, namely the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMO Scale), Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), and Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). Statistical analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and Pearson's product-moment correlation.

The findings revealed that participants generally reported low to moderate levels of FoMO, moderate levels of social comparison, and mild depressive symptoms. Correlational analysis indicated a significant positive relationship among FoMO, social comparison, and depression, suggesting that increased FoMO and comparison tendencies are associated with higher emotional distress among young adults.

The study further found no statistically significant gender differences in FoMO, social comparison, and depression among male and female participants. Thus, the null hypotheses related to gender differences were retained, while the hypothesis regarding the relationship among the variables was rejected due to the presence of significant associations.

The findings support previous literature and theoretical perspectives suggesting that social media engagement, upward social comparison, and fear of exclusion negatively affect psychological well-being. The study concludes that FoMO, social comparison,

and depression function as interconnected psychological mechanisms within digital environments and significantly influence the emotional well-being of young adults.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of promoting healthy social media usage, emotional resilience, self-esteem, and psychological awareness among young adults. The findings may contribute to the development of preventive mental health interventions and awareness programs aimed at reducing unhealthy digital behaviors and improving psychological well-being in the digital era.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: BDI-II

BDI - II

Instructions: This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. Please read each group of statements carefully. And then pick out the one statement in each group that best describes the way you have been feeling during the past two weeks, including today. Circle the number beside the statement you have picked. If several statements in the group seem to apply equally well, circle the highest number for that group. Be sure that you do not choose more than one statement for any group, including Item 16 (Changes in Sleeping Pattern) or Item 18 (Changes in Appetite).

1. Sadness
   0. I do not feel sad.
   1. I feel sad much of the time.
   2. I am sad all the time.
   3. I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.

2. Pessimism
   0. I am not discouraged about my future.
   1. I feel more discouraged about my future than I used to.
   2. I do not expect things to work out for me.
   3. I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.

3. Past Failure
   0. I do not feel like a failure.
   1. I have failed more than I should have.
   2. As I look back, I see a lot of failures.
   3. I feel I am a total failure as a person.

4. Loss of Pleasure
   0. I get as much pleasure as I ever did from the things I enjoy.
   1. I don't enjoy things as much as I used to.
   2. I get very little pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.
   3. I can't get any pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.

5. Guilty Feelings
   0. I don't feel particularly guilty.
   1. I feel guilty over many things I have done or should have done.
   2. I feel quite guilty most of the time.
   3. I feel guilty all of the time.

6. Punishment Feelings
   0. I don't feel I am being punished.
   1. I feel I may be punished.
   2. I expect to be punished.
   3. I feel I am being punished.

7. Self-Dislike
   0. I feel the same about myself as ever.
   1. I have lost confidence in myself.
   2. I am disappointed in myself.
   3. I dislike myself.

8. Self-Criticalness
   0. I don't criticize or blame myself more than usual.
   1. I am more critical of myself than I used to be.
   2. I criticize myself for all of my faults.
   3. I blame myself for everything bad that happens.

9. Suicidal Thoughts or Wishes
   0. I don't have any thoughts of killing myself.
   1. I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out.
   2. I would like to kill myself.
   3. I would kill myself if I had the chance.

10. Crying
   0. I don't cry anymore than I used to.
   1. I cry more than I used to.
   2. I cry over every little thing.
   3. I feel like crying, but I can't.

11. Agitation
   0. I am no more restless or wound up than usual.
   1. I feel more restless or wound up than usual.
   2. I am so restless or agitated, it's hard to stay still.
   3. I am so restless or agitated that I have to keep moving or doing something.

12. Loss of Interest
   0. I have not lost interest in other people or activities.
   1. I am less interested in other people or things than before.
   2. I have lost most of my interest in other people or things.
   3. It's hard to get interested in anything.

13. Indecisiveness
   0. I make decisions about as well as ever.
   1. I find it more difficult to make decisions than usual.
   2. I have much greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.
   3. I have trouble making any decisions.

14. Worthlessness
   0. I do not feel I am worthless.
   1. I don't consider myself as worthwhile and useful as I used to.
   2. I feel more worthless as compared to others.
   3. I feel utterly worthless.

15. Loss of Energy
   0. I have as much energy as ever.
   1. I have less energy than I used to have.
   2. I don't have enough energy to do very much.
   3. I don't have enough energy to do anything.

16. Changes in Sleeping Pattern

0. I have not experienced any change in my sleeping.
1a I sleep somewhat more than usual.
1b I sleep somewhat less than usual.
2a I sleep a lot more than usual.
2b I sleep a lot less than usual.
3a I sleep most of the day.
3b I wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep.

17. Irritability

0. I am not more irritable than usual.
1. I am more irritable than usual.
2. I am much more irritable than usual.
3. I am irritable all the time.

18. Changes in Appetite

0. I have not experienced any change in my appetite.
1a My appetite is somewhat less than usual.
1b My appetite is somewhat greater than usual.
2a My appetite is much less than before.
2b My appetite is much greater than usual.
3a I have no appetite at all.
3b I crave food all the time.

19. Concentration Difficulty

0. I can concentrate as well as ever.
1. I can't concentrate as well as usual.
2. It's hard to keep my mind on anything for very long.
3. I find I can't concentrate on anything.

20. Tiredness or Fatigue

0. I am no more tired or fatigued than usual.
1. I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual.
2. I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do.
3. I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do.

21. Loss of Interest in Sex

0. I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex.
1. I am less interested in sex than I used to be.
2. I am much less interested in sex now.
3. I have lost interest in sex completely.

Total Score: _____

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APPENDIX B: FEAR OF MISSING OUT SCALE

Fear of Missing Out Scale: FoMOs

Przybylski, Murayama, DeHann, & Gladwell (2013)

Participant Instructions

Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the scale provided please indicate how true each statement is of your general experiences. Please answer according to what really reflects your experiences rather than what you think your experiences should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

Response Anchors

Not at all true of me	|	1
Slightly true of me	|	2
Moderately true of me	|	3
Very true of me	|	4
Extremely true of me	|	5

Items

1. I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me.
2. I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me.
3. I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me.
4. I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to.
5. It is important that I understand my friends "in jokes."
6. Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on.
7. It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends.
8. When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g. updating status).
9. When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me.
10. When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing.

Calculating Individual Scores

Individual scores can be computed by averaging responses to all ten items and forms a reliable composite measure (α = .87 to .90).

APPENDIX C: SOCIAL COMPARISON

Table 1: The Questionnaire of the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measureproposed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999)

"Most people compare themselves from time to time with others. For example, they may compare the way they feel, their opinions, their abilities, and/or their situation with those of other people. There is nothing particularly "good" or "bad" about this type of comparison, and some people do it more than others. We would like to find out how often you compare yourself with other people. To do that we would like you to indicate how much you agree with each statement below, by using the following scale."

A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*
I disagree strongly				***I agree strongly***

1. *I often compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing.*
2. *I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.*
3. *If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.*
4. *I often compare how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people.*
5. *I am not the type of person who compares often with others. (reversed)*
6. *I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life.*
7. *I often like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences.*
8. *I often try to find out what others think who face similar problems as I face.*
9. *I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do.*
10. *If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it.*
11. *I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people. (reversed)*