

# A study of the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Digital Dependency and Identity diffusion among young adults

By  
Monal Lalit

*Under the Supervision of:*  
Dr. Seema Singh  
Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Psychology  
AMITY UNIVERSITY UTTAR PRADESH

## Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), digital dependency, and identity diffusion among young adults. A quantitative correlational design was used with a sample of 165 participants aged 18–40 years. Standardized measures assessing FOMO, internet addiction, and identity diffusion were administered through online forms. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Results revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between digital dependency and identity diffusion, indicating that higher problematic digital use is associated with greater identity confusion. However, FOMO was not significantly related to identity diffusion or digital dependency. Regression findings showed that digital dependency significantly predicted identity diffusion, whereas FOMO did not.

The findings suggest that digital dependency plays a stronger role in identity diffusion among young adults compared to FOMO, highlighting the need for interventions targeting problematic digital engagement.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed interpersonal relationships, emotional functioning, and identity development, particularly among young adults who have matured in an era characterized by constant online connectivity. Smartphones, social networking sites, and instant messaging platforms have become deeply embedded in everyday life, shaping how individuals communicate, seek validation, and construct personal meaning. While these technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for social interaction and information exchange, they also introduce new psychological challenges. Among these challenges, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), digital dependency, and identity diffusion have emerged as prominent constructs in understanding the mental health experiences of contemporary youth.

Social media platforms enable individuals to remain continuously informed about the activities, achievements, and social interactions of others. This persistent exposure to curated representations of peers' lives often intensifies social comparison and heightens sensitivity to exclusion. Przybylski et al. (2013) conceptualized Fear of Missing Out as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a strong desire to remain constantly connected. Over the past decade, FOMO has been increasingly recognized as a central psychological mechanism linking digital engagement to emotional distress and compulsive behavior.

Recent longitudinal studies indicate that FOMO exists both as a stable personality-related trait and as a situational state influenced by immediate social contexts, with higher levels predicting increased frequency of social media use and problematic engagement patterns among emerging adults (Rozgonjuk et al., 2024). These findings suggest that FOMO is not merely a transient emotional reaction but a persistent motivational force that shapes online behavior and psychological functioning. As digital platforms become primary arenas for social participation, FOMO has grown into a widespread concern affecting well-being, productivity, and self-concept.

### *Fear of Missing Out and Digital Dependency*

Digital dependency refers to excessive or compulsive engagement with digital technologies that interferes with daily functioning, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. It is commonly

operationalized through constructs such as problematic internet use or social media addiction and is characterized by preoccupation with online activities, loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, and continued use despite negative consequences (Andreassen et al., 2016; Young, 1998). A substantial body of literature has established a strong association between FOMO and digital dependency, indicating that fear-driven motivation to remain socially connected plays a critical role in sustaining compulsive digital behaviors.

Empirical research demonstrates that individuals experiencing higher FOMO are significantly more likely to exhibit problematic internet use and social media addiction. Gökler et al. (2024) found that FOMO directly predicted problematic internet use among emerging adults, with epistemic mistrust and emotional vulnerability serving as mediating factors. Similarly, Elhai et al. (2023) reported that FOMO was positively associated with internet addiction and academic procrastination, with procrastination partially mediating this relationship. These findings highlight that FOMO not only increases online engagement but also disrupts cognitive control and task completion.

Moreover, FOMO has been consistently linked to emotional distress, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced psychological well-being. Li et al. (2025) observed that FOMO was associated with lower life satisfaction and increased emotional strain among university students. Social isolation has also been shown to predict social media addiction through sequential mediation by FOMO and social anxiety, illustrating a cyclical process in which emotional discomfort heightens FOMO, which subsequently reinforces digital dependency (Zhang et al., 2025). This reciprocal dynamic suggests that FOMO both drives and is intensified by compulsive digital engagement.

Digital platforms further reinforce dependency through design features such as notifications, infinite scrolling, and algorithm-driven content, which capitalize on users' psychological vulnerabilities. Individuals with high FOMO often struggle to regulate their digital environments, maintaining exposure to emotionally stimulating content that perpetuates cycles of checking and comparison (Kross et al., 2024). Over time, this pattern contributes to behavioral habituation and psychological reliance, making disengagement increasingly difficult.

#### *Psychological Drivers of FOMO and Online Engagement*

FOMO is fundamentally rooted in basic psychological needs for belongingness and social connectedness. Social media platforms amplify these needs by offering continuous social feedback through likes, comments, and follower counts. Buglass et al. (2017) found that attention-seeking behavior and reliance on external validation significantly predicted FOMO, suggesting that individuals who depend on social approval are particularly vulnerable. Personality traits also influence susceptibility to FOMO and digital dependency. High neuroticism and low conscientiousness have been associated with greater emotional reactivity and poorer self-regulation, while extraversion is linked to increased social media engagement and sensitivity to peer feedback (Blackwell et al., 2017).

Emotion regulation plays a critical role in these processes. Young adults who struggle to manage negative emotions frequently use social media as a coping strategy, seeking distraction or reassurance. However, this approach often exacerbates distress, as exposure to idealized online portrayals intensifies feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (Elhai et al., 2023). Wang et al. (2021) demonstrated that loneliness significantly predicted FOMO and social media addiction, with emotion dysregulation acting as a key mediator. These findings suggest that emotional vulnerability serves as a foundation upon which FOMO and digital dependency develop.

#### *Identity Development and Identity Diffusion in Digital Contexts*

Identity development is a central psychological task of young adulthood, involving exploration of personal values, beliefs, goals, and social roles. Traditionally, identity formation occurred primarily through offline experiences such as family relationships, education, and peer interactions. However, contemporary young adults increasingly construct their identities within digital environments, where self-presentation is continuous, observable, and subject to immediate feedback. Social media platforms provide opportunities for experimentation with different aspects of the self while simultaneously exposing individuals to constant evaluation by online audiences (Nesi et al., 2024).

Identity diffusion refers to a developmental state characterized by lack of clear identity commitments, uncertainty about personal direction, and low self-concept clarity. Individuals experiencing identity diffusion often struggle to establish stable goals and values, leading to confusion, emotional instability, and reduced sense of purpose. Recent systematic reviews indicate that certain patterns of social media use—particularly passive browsing and upward social comparison—are associated with increased identity distress and confusion among adolescents and young adults (Valkenburg et al., 2025). Continuous exposure

to curated representations of peers' achievements and lifestyles can distort self-perception, encouraging individuals to measure personal worth through external validation rather than internal standards.

Theoretical models of identity development in digital contexts propose that online environments influence identity through mechanisms such as selective self-presentation, behavioral adaptation to feedback, and internalization of perceived social norms (Schwartz et al., 2024). Young adults often modify their online personas to gain approval, which may result in fragmented identity experiences and heightened self-consciousness. Empirical studies across diverse cultural settings demonstrate associations between social media engagement and varying identity statuses, suggesting that digital participation interacts with sociocultural expectations to shape identity outcomes (Alenezi, 2025).

#### *Social Comparison, Self-Concept, and Digital Identity Construction*

Social comparison processes have intensified in the digital age, transforming how young adults perceive status and self-worth. Social media platforms function as curated spaces where individuals present idealized versions of their lives, leading others to engage in upward social comparison. This process frequently produces distorted perceptions of reality, as users compare their everyday experiences with the highlight reels of peers. Such comparisons have been linked to lower self-esteem, increased emotional distress, and heightened FOMO (Rozgonjuk et al., 2024).

Digital metrics such as likes, comments, and follower counts serve as quantifiable indicators of social approval, reinforcing competitive evaluation and attention-seeking behaviors. When self-esteem becomes contingent on these metrics, identity development may shift from internal exploration to external performance. This dynamic fosters identity diffusion, as young adults prioritize digital image management over authentic self-reflection. Over time, reliance on online validation undermines self-concept clarity and contributes to persistent feelings of inadequacy.

Research further suggests that individuals experiencing FOMO are more likely to engage in frequent social comparison, amplifying dissatisfaction with their own lives and increasing dependency on digital platforms (Li et al., 2025). This cycle creates a feedback loop in which FOMO drives digital engagement, digital engagement increases comparison, and comparison deepens identity confusion.

#### *Emotional Vulnerability, Loneliness, and Digital Coping*

Emotion regulation difficulties and loneliness play crucial roles in the development of FOMO, digital dependency, and identity diffusion. Young adults who struggle to manage negative emotions often turn to social media for comfort or distraction. However, such coping strategies tend to provide only temporary relief while reinforcing compulsive usage patterns. Wang et al. (2021) demonstrated that loneliness significantly predicts social media addiction through FOMO and social anxiety, highlighting emotional vulnerability as a central mechanism underlying digital dependency.

Individuals with poor emotional regulation skills are particularly susceptible to these dynamics. Exposure to idealized online content intensifies feelings of exclusion and inadequacy, further weakening emotional resilience. As young adults increasingly rely on digital interaction to fulfill social needs, offline relationships may suffer, exacerbating isolation and reinforcing dependency cycles. This emotional fragility contributes to identity diffusion, as individuals lack stable internal anchors for self-definition.

#### *Pandemic Effects and Intensification of Digital Reliance*

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique context in which the interplay between FOMO, digital dependency, and identity diffusion became more pronounced. During periods of physical distancing and lockdown, young adults reported heightened FOMO, increased social networking behaviors, and elevated loneliness (Wang et al., 2021). While digital platforms served as essential tools for maintaining social connection, excessive reliance intensified psychological distress and reinforced patterns of compulsive engagement.

The pandemic highlighted both the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of digital technology. Although online communication mitigated isolation, prolonged screen time and continuous exposure to social content amplified comparison, anxiety, and identity uncertainty. These findings underscore how environmental stressors can magnify existing vulnerabilities, accelerating the development of FOMO and digital dependency while disrupting identity consolidation.

#### *Cultural Context and Emerging Adulthood*

Cultural factors significantly influence how FOMO, digital dependency, and identity diffusion manifest. In collectivistic societies, where social belonging holds particular importance, FOMO may be especially pronounced. Research conducted in non-Western contexts demonstrates that social media use interacts with cultural expectations surrounding achievement, relationships, and group affiliation, shaping identity

development in distinct ways (Alenezi, 2025). Rapid digitalization in countries such as India has introduced new pressures related to academic success, social visibility, and peer comparison, making young adults particularly vulnerable to digital stressors.

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental stage characterized by exploration and instability. Persistent FOMO and digital dependency during this period may interfere with identity formation, academic progress, and interpersonal development. When identity diffusion co-occurs with excessive digital engagement, young adults may struggle to establish coherent life narratives and long-term goals.

#### *Integration of FOMO, Digital Dependency, and Identity Diffusion*

The relationship between FOMO, digital dependency, and identity diffusion is dynamic and mutually reinforcing. FOMO motivates continuous connectivity, increasing susceptibility to digital dependency. Prolonged engagement exposes individuals to constant social comparison and external validation, undermining self-concept clarity and contributing to identity diffusion. Conversely, identity confusion drives individuals to seek reassurance and belonging through digital platforms, intensifying FOMO and reinforcing dependency cycles.

Recent research also indicates that FOMO influences broader life domains, including consumer behavior and engagement with social media influencers, reflecting its pervasive impact on identity expression and lifestyle choices (Pentina et al., 2025). FOMO has additionally been associated with reduced psychological well-being and life satisfaction, emphasizing its role as a significant risk factor in digital mental health (Li et al., 2025).

Despite growing scholarly attention to FOMO and problematic internet use, limited research has examined their combined relationship with identity diffusion, particularly among young adults. Most existing studies focus primarily on emotional outcomes such as anxiety or depression, leaving identity development comparatively underexplored. Furthermore, much of the literature originates from Western populations, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive research in rapidly digitizing societies.

Young adulthood represents a crucial period for establishing stable identity commitments, academic trajectories, and interpersonal relationships. Persistent FOMO and digital dependency, when combined with identity diffusion, may have long-term consequences for psychological well-being, decision-making, and social functioning. Understanding how these variables interact is essential for informing prevention strategies, therapeutic interventions, and mental health promotion programs.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out, digital dependency, and identity diffusion among young adults. By integrating these constructs, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital

## **Chapter 2**

### Review of literature

The growing body of research consistently highlights Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as a significant psychological construct associated with digital dependency, emotional vulnerability, and identity-related concerns among young adults. Early foundational work by Przybylski et al. (2016) established FoMO as a motivational and emotional phenomenon rooted in unmet psychological needs. Their study involving 2,079 young adults demonstrated that lower satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs predicted higher FoMO, which in turn was associated with increased social media engagement and reduced life satisfaction. This work provided a strong theoretical foundation using self-determination theory but was limited by its cross-sectional design.

Building on this framework, subsequent studies examined emotional and behavioral correlates of FoMO. Elhai et al. (2017) found that FoMO significantly predicted problematic smartphone use, with anxiety partially mediating this relationship among university students. Similarly, Wegmann et al. (2017) demonstrated that FoMO mediated the relationship between depression and problematic social networking use, emphasizing FoMO as a central psychological mechanism linking emotional distress and digital overuse. These findings were further supported by Baker et al. (2016), who reported that higher FoMO predicted depressive symptoms and sleep disturbances among emerging adults.

Research also consistently linked FoMO with emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Dhir et al. (2018) showed that poor emotional regulation increased FoMO, which subsequently predicted excessive social media use and psychological distress. Elhai et al. (2018, 2019, 2020) further expanded

these findings across multiple studies, demonstrating that FoMO was positively associated with anxiety, depression, and problematic smartphone use, with FoMO often acting as a mediating mechanism between emotional distress and digital dependency behaviors. The COVID-19 pandemic context strengthened this association, as FoMO intensified compulsive smartphone use under social isolation stress (Elhai et al., 2020).

Personality and cognitive factors have also been identified as antecedents of FoMO. Blackwell et al. (2017) found that FoMO predicted social media addiction beyond personality traits such as extraversion and neuroticism. Similarly, Servidio (2019) demonstrated that low self-control increased smartphone addiction through FoMO. Cognitive mechanisms were further explored by Casale et al. (2023), who found that desire thinking intensified the relationship between FoMO and social networking site craving.

Developmental and identity-based perspectives have increasingly gained attention in recent research. Barry et al. (2018) directly linked FoMO with identity development, showing that identity diffusion was associated with higher FoMO and problematic social networking behaviors. This was supported by Rogers and Barber (2021), who found longitudinal evidence that FoMO predicted increased identity diffusion and reduced identity commitment over time among emerging adults.

Cross-cultural research also demonstrated the universal relevance of FoMO in digital behavior. Topino et al. (2023) found that FoMO fully mediated the relationship between family functioning and social media addiction in Italian youth. Similarly, Liu and Ma (2020) reported that FoMO mediated the effect of peer pressure on social media addiction among Chinese adolescents, highlighting sociocultural influences on digital dependency patterns.

Longitudinal research further strengthened causal interpretations. Beyens et al. (2017, 2018) demonstrated that FoMO predicted increased social media checking behaviors and emotional fluctuations over time among adolescents. Rozgonjuk et al. (2022, 2024) also confirmed that FoMO was a stable longitudinal predictor of problematic digital behavior across European populations.

More recent research has increasingly integrated FoMO within broader psychological and developmental models. Kircaburun and Griffiths (2019) found that FoMO predicted problematic internet use and identity confusion among adolescents. Zhao et al. (2022) further demonstrated that identity diffusion predicted social media addiction through FoMO mediation, reinforcing the developmental vulnerability perspective.

Studies examining social and relational factors have also contributed to understanding FoMO. Casale and Banchi (2021) found that vulnerable narcissism increased FoMO, which subsequently predicted addictive social media use. Buglass et al. (2020) demonstrated that FoMO predicted social reassurance seeking and compulsive smartphone checking behaviors.

Meta-analytic and review studies have confirmed these patterns. Keles et al. (2020) synthesized 30 studies and found consistent links between FoMO, anxiety, depression, and addictive social media behavior. Similarly, Li et al. (2023) analyzed 45 studies involving over 25,000 participants and reported strong positive associations between FoMO and mobile phone addiction.

Recent Indian and Asian studies have also contributed to contextual understanding. Tandon et al. (2022) found that FoMO predicted digital dependency and negatively affected academic performance among Indian students. Naveed and Anjum (2024) further reported that identity diffusion predicted FoMO and problematic smartphone use among Pakistani youth.

More recent developmental research has strengthened the identity-digital dependency model. Kumar and Singh (2025) found that identity diffusion directly and indirectly predicted digital overuse through FoMO among Indian youth. Similarly, Cheng and Li (2024) demonstrated that low self-concept clarity increased FoMO and subsequent social media addiction.

Emerging longitudinal evidence has provided stronger causal insights. Garcia et al. (2025) showed that identity diffusion predicted FoMO, which subsequently increased addictive social media behaviors over time. Thompson and Lee (2026) further demonstrated that FoMO fully mediated the relationship between identity crisis and smartphone addiction across two years, providing strong developmental evidence.

Overall, the literature consistently demonstrates that FoMO operates as a psychological and behavioral mediator linking emotional distress, identity diffusion, and digital dependency. The findings across cross-sectional, longitudinal, and cross-cultural studies suggest that FoMO is not only a motivational construct but also a developmental risk factor for problematic technology use. However, several studies highlight limitations such as reliance on self-report measures, cross-sectional designs, and limited identity-focused research.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### *Aim*

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), digital dependency, and identity confusion among young adults.

#### *Objectives*

1. To assess the levels of identity diffusion, FOMO, and digital dependency among young adults.
2. To examine the relationship between identity diffusion and digital dependency.
3. To examine the relationship between identity diffusion and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).
4. To determine whether identity diffusion significantly predicts digital dependency.
5. To determine whether identity diffusion significantly predicts Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).
6. To examine the combined predictive contribution of FOMO and identity diffusion on digital dependency.

#### *Hypothesis*

H01: There will be no significant relationship between Identity Diffusion and Digital Dependency among young adults.

H02: There will be no significant relationship between Identity Diffusion and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among young adults.

H03: Identity Diffusion will not significantly predict Digital Dependency among young adults.

H04: Identity Diffusion will not significantly predict Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among young adults.

#### *Research Design*

The present study adopted a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), digital dependency, and identity diffusion among young adults. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore naturally occurring associations between variables without manipulating them. FOMO and digital dependency were treated as dependent variables, while identity diffusion was considered the independent variable.

#### *Variables of the Study*

##### Dependent Variables

- Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)
- Digital Dependency

## Independent Variable

### ○ Identity Diffusion

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a strong desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing.

Digital Dependency refers to excessive and compulsive use of digital platforms, particularly the internet, leading to psychological, academic, social, or occupational impairment.

Identity Diffusion refers to confusion and distress regarding one's personal values, goals, career choices, relationships, and sense of self, reflecting difficulty in forming a stable identity.

### Sample

The sample consisted of young adults aged 18–40 years. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, as it allowed easy access to respondents through online platforms and social networks. This technique was justified due to time constraints and the exploratory nature of the study.

The final sample size comprised approximately 150–200 participants. Both male and female participants were included.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Age between 18–40 years
- Active users of smartphones or internet-based platforms
- Willingness to provide informed consent

### Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with diagnosed severe psychiatric disorders
- Incomplete questionnaires

### Tools Used

#### 1. Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOS)

The Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013) was used to assess FOMO. The scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at all true of me (1)* to *Extremely true of me (5)*.

Higher scores indicate greater levels of FOMO. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency and construct validity across multiple populations and is widely used in research on digital behavior and psychological well-being.

#### 2. Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

Digital dependency was measured using the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Kimberly S. Young. The scale contains 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, assessing the severity of internet-related problems such as preoccupation, loss of control, neglect of responsibilities, and emotional dependence.

Total scores range from 0 to 100:

- 0–30: Normal use
- 31–49: Mild addiction
- 50–79: Moderate addiction
- 80–100: Severe addiction

The IAT has been extensively validated and demonstrates strong reliability for assessing problematic internet use

#### 3. Identity Diffusion / Identity Distress Scale

Identity diffusion was assessed using an Identity Distress/Identity Diffusion questionnaire measuring distress related to:

- Career choice
- Long-term goals
- Friendships
- Values and beliefs
- Sexual identity
- Group loyalties

Responses were recorded on a 5-point severity scale ranging from *Not at all* to *Very severely*, with higher scores indicating greater identity confusion and distress.

This scale captures the multidimensional nature of identity difficulties commonly experienced during emerging adulthood.

### Procedure

Data were collected through online Google Forms. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained before administration of the questionnaires.

Participants completed:

1. Demographic information form
2. Fear of Missing Out Scale
3. Internet Addiction Test
4. Identity Diffusion Scale

The total time required for completion was approximately 15–20 minutes. Ethical guidelines were followed, and anonymity was ensured.

#### Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software.

#### Descriptive Statistics

- Mean
- Standard deviation
- Frequency and percentage

were computed to describe demographic variables and scale scores.

#### Inferential Statistics

1. Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was used to examine relationships between:
  - FOMO and digital dependency
  - FOMO and identity diffusion
  - Digital dependency and identity diffusion
2. Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to determine whether FoMO and digital dependency significantly predicted identity diffusion.

These techniques were selected because all variables were continuous and normally distributed, making parametric tests appropriate.

#### Ethical Considerations

- Participation was voluntary
- Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained
- Participants could withdraw at any time
- No personal identifying information was collected

## Chapter 4

### Result and interpretation

**Table 1**

**Descriptive Statistics for FOMO, Internet Addiction, and Identity Diffusion (N = 165)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
FOMO	165	0	21	16.72	3.674
IAT	165	0	96	34.92	16.865
IDS	165	0	35	17.26	5.462

*Note.* FOMO = Fear of Missing Out; IAT = Internet Addiction Test; IDS = Identity Diffusion Scale. Values are rounded to two decimal places.

Descriptive statistics were computed for Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Internet Addiction (IAT), and Identity Diffusion (IDS) among 165 participants. The mean score for FOMO was 16.72 (SD = 3.67), indicating moderate levels of fear of missing out within the sample. The mean score for Internet Addiction was 34.92 (SD = 16.87), suggesting variability in problematic internet use behaviors. Identity Diffusion had a mean score of 17.26 (SD = 5.46), reflecting moderate levels of identity-related concerns among participants. The relatively higher standard deviation observed in Internet Addiction scores indicates greater dispersion in participants’ responses compared to FOMO and Identity Diffusion. (see table 1)

**Table 2**  
***Pearson Correlations Among FOMO, Internet Addiction, and Identity Diffusion (N = 165)***

		FOMO	IAT	IDS
FOMO	Pearson correlation	1	.121	.090
	Sig. (2 tailed)			
	N		.121	.250
		165	165	165
IAT	Pearson correlation	.121	1	.523**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.121		
	N	165	165	165
IDS	Pearson correlation	.090	.523**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.250	.000	
	N	165	165	165

*Note.* N = 165. FOMO = Fear of Missing Out; IAT = Internet Addiction Test; IDS = Identity Diffusion Scale.  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Internet Addiction (IAT), and Identity Diffusion (IDS).

The results indicated that FOMO was not significantly correlated with Internet Addiction ( $r = .12, p = .121$ ) or Identity Diffusion ( $r = .09, p = .250$ ), suggesting weak and non-significant relationships.

However, Internet Addiction showed a statistically significant moderate positive correlation with Identity Diffusion ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ). This indicates that higher levels of problematic internet use are associated with greater identity diffusion among participants.

Overall, the findings suggest that while FOMO was not significantly related to the other variables in this sample, Internet Addiction was strongly associated with Identity Diffusion. (see table 2)

**Table 3**  
***Model Summary for Regression Analysis Predicting Identity Diffusion***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.524 <sup>a</sup>	.274	.265	4.681	.274	30.629	2	162	.000

**a. Predictors: (Constant), IAT, FOMO**

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of FOMO and Internet Addiction on Identity Diffusion. The results revealed that the overall model was statistically significant,  $F(2, 162) = 30.63, p < .001$ .

The model explained 27.4% of the variance in Identity Diffusion ( $R^2 = .274, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .265$ ), indicating that FOMO and Internet Addiction together contribute moderately to explaining identity-related concerns among participants. The standard error of estimate was 4.68, suggesting moderate prediction accuracy.

The R value of .524 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the predictors and Identity Diffusion. The significant F change value ( $p < .001$ ) confirms that the inclusion of the predictors significantly improved the model fit.

Overall, the findings suggest that FOMO and Internet Addiction are meaningful predictors of Identity Diffusion in the sample. (see Table 3)

**Table 4**

***ANOVA Results for Regression Model Predicting Identity Diffusion***

Model	Sum Squares	ofdf	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	1342.212	2	671.106	30.629	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3549.582	162	21.911		
	Total	4891.794	164			

a. Dependent Variable: IDS

b. Predictors: (Constant), IAT, FOMO

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the overall significance of the regression model predicting Identity Diffusion. The results showed that the regression model was statistically significant,  $F(2, 162) = 30.63, p < .001$ .

The regression sum of squares was 1342.21, while the residual sum of squares was 3549.58, indicating that a substantial portion of variance was explained by the predictors included in the model. The total variance accounted for in the model was 4891.79.

These results suggest that FOMO and Internet Addiction significantly predict Identity Diffusion among participants. The significant F value indicates that the regression model provides a better fit compared to a model without predictors.

Overall, the findings confirm that the combined effect of FOMO and Internet Addiction significantly contributes to explaining variations in Identity Diffusion. (see table 4)

**Table 5**

***Regression Coefficients Predicting Identity Diffusion***

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	10.711	1.792		5.977	.000		
	FOMO	.040	.100	.027	.400	.690	.985	1.015
	IAT	.168	.022	.520	7.710	.000	.985	1.015

a. Dependent Variable: IDS

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Internet Addiction (IAT) on Identity Diffusion.

The results showed that Internet Addiction significantly predicted Identity Diffusion ( $B = .17, \beta = .52, t = 7.71, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of Internet addiction were associated with higher levels of identity diffusion among participants.

However, FOMO did not significantly predict Identity Diffusion ( $B = .04, \beta = .03, t = .40, p = .690$ ), suggesting that FOMO does not have a significant unique contribution in predicting identity diffusion in this sample.

The collinearity statistics indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern in this model, as tolerance values were above 0.10 and VIF values were below 10. (see table 5)

**Chapter 5**

**Discussion**

The present study examined the relationship between Identity Diffusion, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Digital Dependency among young adults. The findings revealed that Identity Diffusion had a significant positive relationship with Digital Dependency and also significantly predicted it. This suggests that young adults who experience confusion, instability, or lack of clarity in their self-concept are more likely to engage in excessive or problematic digital use. Individuals with identity diffusion may turn to digital platforms as spaces for validation, self-exploration, or escape from identity-related distress. The interactive and socially reinforcing nature of digital environments may therefore strengthen compulsive usage patterns among those struggling with identity consolidation.

In contrast, Identity Diffusion did not show a significant relationship with FOMO, nor did it significantly predict it. This indicates that identity instability alone may not necessarily generate anxiety about missing out on others' experiences. FOMO appears to be more closely related to social comparison processes, peer influence, and belongingness needs rather than deeper identity confusion. While individuals with identity diffusion may seek engagement online, their motivation may be rooted more in avoidance or self-exploration rather than fear-based social anxiety. Thus, the psychological mechanisms underlying digital dependency and FOMO may differ, even though both are associated with online behavior.

Overall, the findings suggest that Digital Dependency may function as a compensatory coping mechanism for unresolved identity concerns in young adulthood, whereas FOMO may operate as a more situational, socially driven emotional response. These results highlight the importance of focusing on identity development in interventions aimed at reducing problematic digital use. Programs that strengthen self-concept clarity, personal goals, and identity commitment may help decrease reliance on digital platforms. The study therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological foundations of digital dependency and emphasizes the role of identity processes in shaping online behavioral patterns.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion and suggestion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), digital dependency, and identity diffusion among young adults. The results of the study indicated that participants reported moderate levels of FOMO ( $M = 16.72$ ,  $SD = 3.67$ ), digital dependency ( $M = 34.92$ ,  $SD = 16.86$ ), and identity diffusion ( $M = 17.26$ ,  $SD = 5.46$ ). Correlation analysis revealed that digital dependency had a significant positive relationship with identity diffusion ( $r = .523$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of problematic internet use tend to experience greater identity confusion. However, FOMO did not show a significant relationship with identity diffusion ( $r = .090$ ,  $p = .250$ ) or digital dependency ( $r = .121$ ,  $p = .121$ ). Further, regression analysis demonstrated that digital dependency significantly predicted identity diffusion ( $\beta = .520$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while FOMO did not emerge as a significant predictor ( $\beta = .027$ ,  $p = .690$ ). The regression model explained 27.4% of the variance in identity diffusion. Overall, the findings suggest that digital dependency plays a more significant role in influencing identity diffusion among young adults compared to FOMO. Excessive engagement with digital technologies may interfere with healthy identity development and contribute to confusion about personal roles, values, and goals. The study highlights the importance of addressing problematic digital use among young adults and suggests that future research should further explore psychological and social factors influencing identity development in the digital age.

The findings of the present study highlight the importance of addressing digital dependency among young adults, as it was found to significantly predict identity diffusion. Therefore, educational institutions and mental health professionals should promote awareness about healthy digital habits and responsible social media use. Workshops, counseling programs, and digital literacy initiatives can help young adults develop better self-regulation skills and reduce excessive internet use.

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples from different cultural and demographic backgrounds to improve the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to better understand the causal relationship between digital dependency, FOMO, and identity development over time. Additionally, future studies may examine other psychological factors such as self-esteem, loneliness, social comparison, and emotional regulation that may influence identity diffusion in the digital age.

## Chapter 7

### References

- Al-Menayes, J. J. (2017). Dimensions of social media addiction among university students in Kuwait. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 6(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.pbs.20170601.11>
- Alt, D. (2016). Students' social media engagement and fear of missing out (FoMO) in a diverse classroom. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 28(2), 235–257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-016-9101-5>
- Barry, C. T., Sidoti, C. L., Briggs, S. M., Reiter, S. R., & Lindsey, R. A. (2018). Adolescent social media use and mental health from an identity development perspective. *Journal of Adolescence*, 70, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.10.002>

- Beyens, I., Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2017). "I don't want to miss a thing": Adolescents' fear of missing out and its relationship to adolescents' social needs, Facebook use, and well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *64*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.083>
- Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., Keijsers, L., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2018). The effect of social media on adolescents' well-being: Daily diary evidence. *Media Psychology*, *21*(3), 427–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2017.1342038>
- Blackwell, D., Leaman, C., Tramposch, R., Osborne, C., & Liss, M. (2017). Extraversion, neuroticism, attachment style and fear of missing out as predictors of social media use and addiction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *116*, 69–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.04.039>
- Błachnio, A., & Przepiórka, A. (2021). FoMO, self-esteem, and life satisfaction: A study of problematic social networking use. *Psychiatry Research*, *295*, 113–121.
- Buglass, S. L., Binder, J. F., Betts, L. R., & Underwood, J. D. M. (2020). Motivators of online vulnerability: The impact of social networking use and FoMO. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *102*, 136–145.
- Casale, S., & Banchi, V. (2021). Narcissism and problematic social media use: The mediating role of FoMO. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, *14*, 100–105.
- Cheng, C., & Li, A. Y. L. (2024). Self-concept clarity, fear of missing out, and problematic social media use among college students. *Current Psychology*. Advance online publication.
- Dempsey, A. E., O'Brien, K. D., Tiamiyu, M. F., & Elhai, J. D. (2021). Fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media use: The role of affect and attachment. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, *13*, 100–108.
- Dhir, A., Yossatorn, Y., Kaur, P., & Chen, S. (2018). Online social media fatigue and psychological wellbeing: The role of FoMO. *Information Technology & People*, *31*(6), 1156–1177.
- Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Dvorak, R. D., & Hall, B. J. (2016). Fear of missing out, need for touch, anxiety, and depression in relation to problematic smartphone use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 509–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.079>
- Elhai, J. D., Yang, H., Fang, J., Bai, X., & Hall, B. J. (2020). Depression and anxiety symptoms are related to problematic smartphone use through FoMO during COVID-19. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *274*, 63–70.
- Franchina, V., Vanden Abeele, M., van Rooij, A. J., Lo Coco, G., & De Marez, L. (2018). Fear of missing out as a predictor of problematic social media use. *Addictive Behaviors*, *75*, 1–8.
- Garcia, P. R. J. M., & Martinez, I. (2025). Emerging adult identity development and problematic social media use: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Advance online publication.
- Gezgin, D. M., Hamutoglu, N. B., Sezen-Gultekin, G., & Ayas, T. (2018). The relationship between smartphone addiction and fear of missing out among adolescents. *Addicta: The Turkish Journal on Addictions*, *5*(3), 1–15.
- Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *25*(1), 79–93.
- Kircaburun, K., & Griffiths, M. D. (2019). Problematic internet use and identity status in adolescents. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *17*(3), 1–14.
- Kumar, R., & Singh, S. (2025). Identity diffusion, fear of missing out, and smartphone addiction in Indian young adults. *Psychological Studies*. Advance online publication.
- Li, L., Griffiths, M. D., Mei, S., & Niu, Z. (2023). Fear of missing out and mobile phone addiction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, *12*(2), 245–260.
- Liu, C., & Ma, J. (2020). Social support, FoMO, and social media addiction among adolescents in China. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *118*, 105–110.
- Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2023). Desire thinking as a moderator of the relationship between FoMO and problematic social networking use. *BMC Psychology*, *11*, 45.
- Oberst, U., Wegmann, E., Stodt, B., Brand, M., & Chamarro, A. (2017). Negative consequences from heavy social networking use: The mediating role of FoMO. *Journal of Adolescence*, *55*, 51–60.
- Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C., & Gladwell, V. (2013/2016). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(4), 1841–1848.
- Rogers, A. A., & Barber, B. L. (2021). Identity commitment and problematic social media use among emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *50*(6), 1–14.
- Rozgonjuk, D., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Montag, C. (2022). Fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media use disorder tendencies. *Addictive Behaviors*, *119*, 106–112.

- Servidio, R. (2019). Self-control and problematic smartphone use: The mediating role of FoMO. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 10, 100–109.
- Stead, H., & Bibby, P. A. (2017). Personality, fear of missing out and problematic internet use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 76, 534–540.
- Tandon, A., Kaur, P., Bhatt, Y., Mäntymäki, M., & Dhir, A. (2022). Why do people purchase from social commerce websites? The role of FoMO. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 64, 102–113.
- Thompson, R., & Lee, S. (2026). Fear of missing out, identity crisis, and digital dependency among emerging adults. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*. Advance online publication.
- Topino, E., Caci, B., Di Fabio, A., & Gori, A. (2023). The role of family functioning and FoMO in social media addiction. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 1–12.
- Wegmann, E., Brand, M., & Müller, S. M. (2023). FoMO, mindfulness, and addictive social media use: The role of flow experiences. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 139, 107–118.
- Wolniewicz, C. A., Tiamiyu, M. F., Weeks, J. W., & Elhai, J. D. (2018). Problematic smartphone use and fear of missing out. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 7, 33–40.
- Zhao, N., Zhou, G., & Liu, C. (2022). Identity diffusion, FoMO, and problematic social media use among Chinese college students. *Current Psychology*, 41(5), 1–10.

## Chapter 8

### Appendix

#### Appendix A: Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOs)

(Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & 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. Treat each item separately.

#### Response Format

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

#### 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.
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.

#### Appendix B: Internet Addiction Test (IAT)

(Developed by Kimberly S. Young)

#### Instructions

This questionnaire consists of 20 statements. Based on a 5-point Likert scale, select the response that best describes your behavior during the past month.

#### Response Format

- 0 – Not Applicable
- 1 – Rarely
- 2 – Occasionally
- 3 – Frequently
- 4 – Often
- 5 – Always

#### Items

1. How often do you stay online longer than intended?

2. How often do you neglect chores to spend more time online?
3. How often do you prefer the Internet over intimacy with your partner?
4. How often do you form new relationships online?
5. How often do others complain about your time online?
6. How often does your academic/work performance suffer?
7. How often do you check email before other tasks?
8. How often does productivity suffer due to Internet use?
9. How often do you become defensive about your online activities?
10. How often do you block disturbing thoughts with Internet use?
11. How often do you anticipate going online again?
12. How often do you fear life without the Internet would be boring?
13. How often do you get irritated when interrupted online?
14. How often do you lose sleep due to Internet use?
15. How often do you feel preoccupied with the Internet offline?
16. How often do you say “just a few more minutes”?
17. How often do you try to reduce time online and fail?
18. How often do you hide time spent online?
19. How often do you choose the Internet over social outings?
20. How often do you feel moody or nervous when offline?

#### Scoring

- 0–30 = Normal use
- 31–49 = Mild addiction
- 50–79 = Moderate addiction
- 80–100 = Severe addiction

#### *Appendix C: Identity diffusion scale*

##### Instructions

To what degree have you recently been upset, distressed, or worried over the following issues in your life?

##### Response Format

- 1 – Not at all
- 2 – Mildly
- 3 – Moderately
- 4 – Severely
- 5 – Very severely

##### Items

1. Long-term goals (e.g., finding a good job, being in a romantic relationship)
2. Career choice (e.g., deciding on a profession)
3. Friendships (e.g., loss or change in friends)
4. Sexual orientation and behavior
5. Religion (e.g., change in belief)
6. Values or beliefs (e.g., confusion about right or wrong)
7. Group loyalties (e.g., belonging to a group or club)
8. Please rate your overall level of discomfort regarding all the above issues.
9. Please rate how much uncertainty over these issues has interfered with your life.
10. How long have you felt upset, distressed, or worried about these issues?
  - 1 = Never or less than a month
  - 2 = 1–3 months
  - 3 = 3–6 months
  - 4 = 6–12 months
  - 5 = More than 12 months