



## A study on Fear of Missing out and Social Comparison Orientation among college Students in Nilgiri District

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**Abstract:** *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a widely used contemporary term defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. FoMO has become increasingly prevalent among youth populations, and research indicates that higher levels are associated with adverse psychological outcomes. Social Comparison Orientation (SCO), conceptualised within Social Comparison Theory refers to an individual's tendency to evaluate abilities, opinions, and life situations by comparing with others. Although social comparison is natural, excessive engagement may negatively affect psychological well-being. The present study investigates the relationship between FoMO and SCO among college students.*

*Using a correlational research design, data were collected from a sample of 120 college students aged 18 to 23 years. The participants were recruited from the Thaloor region of the Nilgiris district. Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) was assessed using the Fear of Missing Out Scale, while Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) was measured using the Iowa–Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM).*

*The findings indicate that students with higher Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) reported higher Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Gender analysis showed females scored slightly higher on both variables. The positive association suggests potential implications for college students' psychological well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Comparison Orientation (SCO), Psychological Well-Being, College Students.*

**Introduction:** Human brains have been shaped and conditioned in certain ways over the course of evolution. During the Stone Age, humans lived in groups and engaged in collective activities such as hunting and gathering for survival. As a result, the human mind has been inherently oriented toward social living from early times, leading to a natural tendency to seek belonging and participation in groups. In this context, the concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) becomes relevant. FoMO has become increasingly common in recent times, particularly with the rapid growth of the internet and social media usage. It can manifest in different forms, such as persistent thoughts about what others are doing, whether they are having enjoyable experiences without one's involvement, or, in more severe cases, leading to significant psychological distress. Social comparison, or the tendency to evaluate oneself in relation to others and the surrounding environment, is a normal human process. It provides opportunities for learning new skills, enhancing social awareness, and improving one's life, and therefore plays an important role in adaptation, survival, and

learning. However, excessive social comparison may contribute to psychological distress, especially among young adults. This study aims to find the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among college students in the Nilgiri district.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a construct that has gained considerable attention in the past decade within psychological and behavioural research. The term was originally coined in 2004 by Patrick J. McGinnis in a Herbs op-ed. FoMO is operationally defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO appears to be particularly prevalent among young adults, especially college students, who often attempt to keep up with their friends and peers in order to maintain social connectedness. This behavioural tendency can be understood in relation to heightened social comparison processes and the developmental need for peer acceptance during emerging adulthood.

Moreover, existing empirical studies indicate that excessive levels of FoMO are associated with a range of adverse psychological outcomes, including depression, lower self-esteem, emotional distress, and loneliness. From a research perspective, higher FoMO is linked with increased social monitoring behaviours and persistent concern about social engagement, which may negatively influence overall psychological well-being. Therefore, FoMO can be conceptualised as a significant psychosocial factor affecting mental health, particularly within college student populations.

Another construct that is closely related to FoMO is Social Comparison Orientation (SCO), which is conceptualised within Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954). SCO refers to an individual's tendency to evaluate their abilities, opinions, and life situations by comparing themselves with others. Social comparison has both positive and negative aspects. Comparing others' skills and abilities can be motivating and may help individuals gain knowledge and improve their competencies. However, excessive comparison in all aspects of life may negatively affect psychological well-being and contribute to emotional distress. Young adults are more likely to engage in social comparison, as this developmental stage involves increased peer interaction and sensitivity to others' evaluations. Several studies have examined this perspective, often investigating SCO in relation to multiple variables such as self-esteem, social media use, and other psychosocial factors.

**Rationale:** In the current digital era, where individuals are constantly connected through the internet and frequently observe others' lives through social media, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has become increasingly relevant among college students. Numerous studies have examined FoMO and social media use, often considering related variables such as self-esteem, self-worth, and other psychological factors. However, studies examining the direct relationship between social media comparison and FoMO are limited. Therefore, the present study aims to address this research gap by investigating the direct relationship between social media comparison and Fear of Missing Out among college students in the Nilgiri region.

By selecting college students from the Nilgiri region as the sample, the study includes a diverse population drawn from both Kerala and Tamil Nadu. College students and the younger generation are generally more aligned with emerging social trends and contemporary culture; therefore, using this sample is likely to yield more appropriate and relevant results. Examining gender differences in this context will help identify general patterns of vulnerability. Overall, this study aims to investigate whether Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) functions as a vulnerability factor for Fear of Missing Out (FoMO).

**Review of Literature:** Saher Parvez, Amna Amjad, and Sumaira Ayub (2023) conducted a study titled "Fear of Missing Out, Social Comparison and Social Media Addiction among Young Adults." The study examined the relationship between FoMO, social comparison, and social media addiction. The findings revealed that FoMO had a significant positive relationship with social comparison, social media addiction, and their respective sub-scales among young adults. Furthermore, the study identified significant gender differences, indicating that men reported higher levels of FoMO than women.

J. P. Rose, K. A. Edmonds, Rami Moussa, and E. Gallinari (2025) examined social comparison as a vulnerability factor for experiencing FoMO and its consequences. The study emphasised that individuals with high social comparison orientation are more sensitive to FoMO, whereas those with low social comparison orientation experience less emotional impact. The findings suggest that social comparison orientation functions as a vulnerability factor influencing individuals' responses to FoMO experiences.

Leon Festinger (1954), an American social psychologist, proposed Social Comparison Theory, which explains that individuals have an inherent drive to gain accurate self-evaluations. According to the theory, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves with others to reduce uncertainty and better define the self. Thus, social comparison serves as a mechanism of self-assessment and evaluation.

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (1985) proposed Self-Determination Theory, a broad theory of human motivation and personality that focuses on individuals' tendencies toward growth and psychological well-being. The theory posits that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When the need for relatedness is not satisfied, individuals may experience FoMO as a response to unmet social connection needs.

Manyak Gupta and Aditya Sharma (2021) suggested that FoMO may originate from distorted cognitions related to the fear of missing out on rewarding experiences. The study further indicated that FoMO is reinforced by constant engagement with social networking services and is associated with decreased productivity and adverse mental health outcomes.

**Statement of Problem:** In the digital era, young people are highly engaged in social networking services. Increased exposure to peers' achievements and activities through social media may intensify social comparison tendencies and contribute to the development of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Previous research has examined FoMO and social comparison orientation through intermediary variables such as self-esteem, social media addiction, and digital well-being. However, limited studies have directly investigated the relationship between FoMO and social comparison orientation among college students. Therefore, there is a need to examine the direct relationship between these two variables in this population. In addition, gender differences in FoMO and social comparison orientation need to be examined. The study has important implications for mental health, as understanding the vulnerability associated with social comparison orientation and FoMO may contribute to future research and promote life satisfaction among college students.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To explore the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among male and female college students.
2. To assess the difference in Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among male and female college students
3. To assess the difference in Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among male and female college students.

### **Research Methodology**

**Aim:** To evaluate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) and gender difference among college students from Nilgiri District

**Research Design :** This study following the correlational Research Design, this Research design examines the degree of relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among college students in the Nilgiri region . This design shows whether FoMO and SCO are positively

related to each other and to understand the strength and direction of their relationship. The study also analyses how gender differences are reflected in FoMO and SCO among college students.

**Sampling Design and Description:** The present study employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique to select college students from Nilgiri district. The sample comprised 102 college students aged between 18 and 23 years. Among them, 51 were males and 51 were females. The inclusion of different genders enabled the researcher to examine potential gender differences in the study variables. Convenience sampling was chosen due to ease of access, time efficiency, cost effectiveness, and the likelihood of obtaining a high response rate. However, as a non-probability sampling method, the findings may have limited generalisability beyond similar populations

**Procedure:** The tool used in this study was a structured questionnaire, which was distributed through an online Google Form across the Nilgiri region. The college students, including both girls and boys, filled out the questionnaires voluntarily. The questionnaire contain sociodemographic data, the 10-item FoMO scale, and 11 paraphrased items of the INCOM scale. After the data collection, the responses were organised and prepared for analysis, discussion, and summarisation in order to examine the relationship between FoMO and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among the participants. The process of data collection was carried out systematically, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the study.

### **Tools and Techniques**

- Sociodemographic data sheet : this tool used to gather important demographic data of the sample such as Name, Age, Gender, education and socioeconomic status. This helps to understanding the samples nature and necessary information.
- Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMO; 2013 ) : The Fear of Missing Out Scale assesses participants' fear of missing out through their everyday experiences . Originally, the scale Contained 32 items scored using five-point Likert-type scale . Here, we are used shortened version of FoMO scale including 10 items. FoMOs scale showed high amount of information across a broad range of the FoMO continuum
- Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) : INCOM scale is self-report scale developed to assess individual differences in social comparison orientation based on Leon Festinger's social comparison theory (1954). 11-item Likert-type scale in which participants indicate the extent to which each statement describes them . This scale giving an evaluation of SCO in college students.

**Statistical Analysis:** The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation and t-test) to understand the relationship between the variables and the differences between male and female college students. Normality was assessed prior to the analysis, and the results indicated that the data were normally distributed. Pearson's correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO), and the findings showed a significant relationship between the variables. Subsequently, an independent samples t-test was performed to determine the differences between male and female students in Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison Orientation.

## Findings :

**Table 1:** Showing the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and Social Comparison Orientation among college students using Pearson's correlation test.

		FoMO	SCO
FoMO	Pearson's Correlation sig. (2-tailed)	1	.428**
SCO	Pearson's Correlation sig. (2-tailed)	.428**	1

**Table 2:** Showing the mean and standard deviation of Fear of Missing out and Social Comparison Orientation among male and female college students.

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
FoMO	1	23.7843	1.07496
	2	21.3529	5.90194
SCO	1	32.2157	6.85073
	2	32.4130	6.59150

**Table 3:** Showing the relationship between male and female in FoMO and SCO through independent t test.

		t	df	p
FoMO	Equal Variance Assumed	1.793	100	0.76
	Equal Variance not Assumed	1.793	93.803	0.76
SCO	Equal Variance Assumed	-.144	9.0	.886
	Equal Variance not Assumed	-.145	94.59	.885

**Result and Discussion:** The present study examined the relationship between social comparison orientation (SCO) and fear of missing out (FoMO) among college students. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation, indicating that students who engage more frequently in social comparison tend to experience higher levels of FoMO. This finding supports Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, which proposes that individuals evaluate their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others. Such comparison processes may increase feelings of inadequacy or concerns about being left out.

The study also found no significant gender differences in FoMO or SCO among male and female students. This suggests that both genders experience similar levels of social comparison tendencies and fear of missing out. Therefore, the hypotheses proposing gender differences were rejected.

The findings contribute to the growing literature on social comparison and FoMO by providing empirical evidence of their positive association among college students. They suggest that FoMO is closely linked to individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves in relation to others.

Practically, the results highlight the importance of promoting healthy self-evaluation and emotional well-being among students. Educational institutions may implement awareness programs and counseling interventions to help students manage comparison tendencies and reduce feelings of missing out, irrespective of gender.

**Conclusion :** The present study examined the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) among male and female college students. The statistical analysis revealed a significant association between FoMO and SCO across both genders. Additionally, the findings indicate no significant gender differences in levels of FoMO and SCO.

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