

Social Media Addiction, Fear of Missing Out, Body Image Concerns and Self-Esteem in Adults

Saleem Gul

saleemgull786@gmail.com

Assistant Professor of Psychology, Head of Psychology Department, Govt. Associate College for Boys Bedian Road
Lahore

Hassan Imran

hassanimran332@gmail.com

Clinical Psychologist, SkinDot Clinics PWD Branch, Islamabad & PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, Riphah
International University, Faisalabad Campus

Maidah Arshad

hwork74@gmail.com

MS Clinical Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Central Punjab, Lahore

Kiran Shahzadi

kiranshahzadi489@gmail.com

MS clinical Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology, National University of Medical Sciences Rawalpindi,
Pakistan

Alishba Ishfaq

alishbaishfaq0@gmail.com

MS clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology Lahore Garrison University

Shamsa Batool

shamsabatool007@gmail.com

MS Clinical Psychology, Forman Christian College A Chartered University, HOD & Clinical Psychologist Al -Razi
Institute Lahore

Corresponding Author: * Hassan Imran hassanimran332@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the relationships among social media addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), body image concerns, and self-esteem in emerging adults. With the increasing prevalence of social media use, concerns have been raised regarding its psychological impact, particularly on young adults who are navigating identity development and social comparison. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, and data were collected from 300 emerging adults aged 18–25 years using standardized self-report measures, including the Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS), Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS), Body Image Concern Scale (BICS), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression analyses, and mediation analysis were conducted using SPSS and PROCESS Macro. Results indicated that social media addiction is positively associated with FoMO ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$) and body image concerns ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$), while it is negatively associated with self-esteem ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$). FoMO partially mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns, suggesting that individuals with higher addictive engagement experience greater anxiety about missing out, which in turn heightens body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, body image concerns emerged as the strongest predictor of self-esteem, highlighting the critical role of appearance-related concerns in determining self-worth among emerging adults. These findings underscore the importance of developing targeted interventions to promote healthier social media engagement, reduce FoMO, and enhance self-esteem. Implications for mental health practitioners, educators, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Body Image Concerns, Self-Esteem and Emerging Adults

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has emerged as one of the most dominant forces shaping human interaction, identity formation, and psychological functioning. Emerging adults, typically aged 18–25, are among the highest consumers of social networking platforms, using them for communication, entertainment, self-expression, and social validation (Arnett, 2015). With the rapid evolution of technology, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook have created environments where individuals are continuously exposed to peer activities, curated lifestyles, and idealized images. While social media offers opportunities for connection and creativity, its excessive use has been associated with concerning behavioral and psychological patterns. One such pattern is social media addiction, defined as compulsive, uncontrolled, and repetitive use that interferes with daily functioning and well-being (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Research shows that when engagement becomes excessive, individuals may experience emotional dependence, withdrawal symptoms, and loss of control paralleling behavioral addictions such as gambling. Additionally, the constant exposure to socially rewarding stimuli, notifications, and algorithm-driven content reinforces habitual use, making emerging adults more susceptible to addictive tendencies compared to older populations (Andreassen, 2015). As this age group undergoes significant developmental changes, including identity exploration and increased autonomy, their psychological vulnerability is heightened. These developmental factors make emerging adults particularly sensitive to peer influence, social comparison, and belongingness needs. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms through which social media affects their psychological functioning is crucial. Examining variables such as social media addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), body image concerns, and self-esteem is essential for identifying the digital pressures shaping their emotional and behavioral outcomes (Przybylski et al., 2013).

A major psychological process that intensifies social media use among emerging adults is the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) a pervasive anxiety that others are experiencing rewarding events without one's awareness or participation (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO has become especially prevalent in the era of constant connectivity, where social platforms allow real-time updates about friends' activities, successes, and social gatherings. For many emerging adults, seeing peers engage in enjoyable or meaningful experiences can trigger pressure to remain constantly online to stay updated or socially relevant (Baker et al., 2016). This compulsion often leads to frequent checking behaviors, nighttime scrolling, and emotional dependency on notifications. FoMO also contributes to unhealthy comparison and reinforces the belief that one's own experiences are inadequate compared to others. Research indicates that individuals with higher FoMO scores are significantly more likely to develop problematic social media use, suggesting that FoMO acts as a psychological driver for addictive behaviors (Riordan et al., 2020). Moreover, FoMO has been linked to negative emotional outcomes, such as anxiety, loneliness, and decreased life satisfaction, as individuals continuously monitor others' achievements while underestimating their own. Emerging adults, who are in a transitional developmental stage, often experience increased sensitivity to social belonging and peer approval, making them more prone to FoMO-driven digital habits (Arnett, 2015). As a result, FoMO not only intensifies social media engagement but also creates a cycle of emotional insecurity and compulsive online behavior. Understanding the relationship between FoMO and social media addiction is therefore critical, as it represents a gateway to broader psychological difficulties within this age group.

Another important factor influenced by social media use is body image concern, a psychological construct referring to dissatisfaction or anxiety about one's physical appearance. Visual-based platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat expose emerging adults to a continuous stream of highly edited, filtered, and idealized images promoting unrealistic beauty standards and pressuring users to conform to culturally valued appearances (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Frequent exposure to such content intensifies social comparison tendencies, especially among individuals already vulnerable to appearance-related

insecurities. Social comparison theory suggests that people evaluate themselves based on comparisons with others, and when these comparisons are upward toward idealized figures they often lead to negative self-perceptions (Festinger, 1954). Studies have consistently shown that increased time spent on social media is associated with higher body dissatisfaction, internalization of thin/fit ideals, and engagement in appearance-related behaviors such as excessive grooming, photo editing, or body monitoring (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Emerging adults may experience pressure to present flawless images online to gain likes, comments, or followers, reinforcing the belief that self-worth is tied to physical attractiveness. The interactive nature of these platforms means that users are not only exposed to content but also actively engage by posting, editing, and evaluating their own images. This can heighten preoccupation with appearance, leading to negative emotional states such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment. Over time, these concerns may contribute to broader psychological issues, including low self-esteem, depression, and social anxiety. Given the developmental vulnerability of emerging adults, exploring how social media shapes body image concerns is essential for understanding their mental health outcomes.

Self-esteem, defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth, is another important psychological variable impacted by digital engagement. Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental period during which individuals consolidate their identity and build confidence in their skills, relationships, and goals (Arnett, 2015). However, excessive social media use has been found to distort self-perception and undermine global self-esteem. One mechanism relates to social comparison, where individuals judge themselves against others' highlight reels, often perceiving themselves as less successful, attractive, or socially fulfilled (Vogel et al., 2014). Another mechanism involves validation-seeking behaviors, such as relying on likes, comments, or followers to feel valued. When online feedback is limited or negative, it may lead to self-doubt and reduced self-worth. Research has shown that individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to use social media compulsively as a coping mechanism, seeking social reassurance or avoiding offline stressors (Andreassen, 2015). However, this behavior can worsen psychological functioning by reinforcing dependence on external approval and increasing emotional sensitivity to online interactions. Cyberbullying, negative comments, and peer rejection further exacerbate low self-esteem, contributing to emotional distress and social withdrawal. Additionally, the curated nature of social media encourages users to present idealized versions of themselves, creating discrepancies between their online identity and real self another factor linked to lower self-esteem and poorer mental health outcomes (Vogel et al., 2014). Because self-esteem acts as a protective factor against psychological stress, understanding how it is influenced by social media is vital, especially among emerging adults navigating identity formation.

Taken together, the patterns observed across social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem reveal a complex and interconnected psychological landscape for emerging adults. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they influence one another in reciprocal and reinforcing ways. For example, individuals experiencing FoMO may engage excessively with social media, which increases exposure to idealized images and triggers body dissatisfaction. In turn, appearance-related insecurities may reduce self-esteem, leaving individuals more vulnerable to compulsive online behaviors as a means of coping or seeking validation (Baker et al., 2016). Social media addiction further fuels this cycle by promoting constant connectivity and reducing opportunities for meaningful offline interactions, emotional regulation, and self-reflection. The interplay among these variables illustrates a broader challenge faced by emerging adults: navigating an online environment that offers connection and visibility but also promotes comparison, dependency, and insecurity. Understanding these relationships is essential for identifying at-risk individuals and designing interventions aimed at promoting healthy digital habits. Educational programs, digital literacy training, and psychological interventions that target FoMO reduction, body positivity, and self-worth enhancement may serve as protective factors (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). As social media continues to evolve, its psychological impact is likely to grow, making it imperative for researchers, educators, and mental health professionals to examine these

dynamics thoroughly. By investigating these variables collectively, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes the mental health and well-being of emerging adults, ultimately contributing to evidence-based strategies for healthier digital engagement.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between social media addiction and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) among emerging adults?
2. How does social media addiction relate to body image concerns in emerging adults?
3. What is the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem in emerging adults?
4. Does FoMO mediate the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns?
5. To what extent do social media addiction, FoMO, and body image concerns predict self-esteem in emerging adults?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between social media addiction and FoMO among emerging adults.
2. To investigate the association between social media addiction and body image concerns.
3. To assess the relationship between social media addiction and self-esteem.
4. To determine whether FoMO mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns.
5. To evaluate the predictive roles of social media addiction, FoMO, and body image concerns on self-esteem in emerging adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media addiction has become an increasingly prominent concern among emerging adults, characterized by excessive, compulsive, and uncontrolled use of online platforms that interferes with daily life, work, and interpersonal relationships (Andreassen, 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The phenomenon shares similarities with other behavioral addictions, such as gambling, in that it involves salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Several studies indicate that individuals high in social media addiction experience significant disruptions in academic performance, emotional regulation, sleep quality, and physical activity (Andreassen et al., 2012). Psychological mechanisms, including reward sensitivity, reinforcement schedules of notifications, and cognitive biases toward social validation, play a crucial role in sustaining compulsive use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Personality traits such as high neuroticism, low conscientiousness, and impulsivity have been identified as significant predictors of social media addiction, highlighting that individual differences affect vulnerability (Andreassen et al., 2017). Contextual and technological factors, including platform design, algorithmic content recommendations, and constant connectivity, further reinforce habitual use, creating a cycle of engagement that can be difficult to disrupt. Empirical studies have utilized standardized instruments such as the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale to quantify addictive tendencies, revealing prevalence rates ranging from 5% to 15% in emerging adults, depending on demographic factors (Andreassen, 2015). Longitudinal research suggests that early exposure to social media and high engagement during late adolescence may predict increased compulsive use in adulthood, emphasizing the developmental significance of the emerging adult period. Therefore, social media addiction is not simply a behavioral preference but a multidimensional phenomenon with cognitive, emotional, and social consequences, necessitating comprehensive research and intervention approaches targeting both individual and systemic factors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has emerged as a central psychological construct linked to excessive social media engagement, conceptualized as the pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO has been extensively studied as both a predictor and consequence of problematic digital behaviors among emerging adults. High levels of FoMO are associated with compulsive checking behaviors, constant connectivity, and emotional dependency on online platforms, reinforcing cycles of social media addiction (Riordan et al., 2020). Emerging adults are particularly susceptible to FoMO due to developmental factors, such as the heightened need for social acceptance, peer approval, and identity exploration (Arnett, 2015). Empirical evidence indicates that individuals with higher FoMO report increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, and lower overall life satisfaction, as they frequently compare their offline experiences with peers' curated online activities (Baker et al., 2016). Experimental studies have demonstrated that exposure to social media updates can trigger immediate FoMO responses, including negative affect and urges to engage online, suggesting a direct cognitive-emotional mechanism linking social media visibility to behavioral outcomes. Additionally, FoMO mediates the relationship between personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion and social media addiction, indicating that individual predispositions interact with cognitive-emotional processes to influence compulsive engagement (Riordan et al., 2020). Theoretical models emphasize that FoMO fulfills a fundamental need for belonging and relatedness, but paradoxically perpetuates dependence on digital platforms while exacerbating feelings of inadequacy, social comparison, and anxiety. Consequently, FoMO represents a critical psychological pathway through which social media exerts its influence on emerging adults' emotional well-being, making it an essential variable for understanding and addressing the negative consequences of digital behavior.

Social media's impact on body image concerns has been a major focus of contemporary psychological research, particularly due to the prevalence of visual-oriented platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Body image concerns refer to negative evaluations of one's physical appearance, often accompanied by dissatisfaction, preoccupation, and anxiety regarding personal attractiveness. Social comparison theory provides the primary framework explaining these effects, suggesting that individuals evaluate themselves relative to perceived social standards and idealized representations (Festinger, 1954). Empirical research indicates that repeated exposure to curated, edited, and idealized images of peers and influencers promotes upward social comparisons, leading to greater body dissatisfaction and internalization of unrealistic beauty standards. Experimental studies demonstrate that even brief exposure to idealized images increases negative mood and appearance-related anxiety in emerging adults, while longitudinal studies reveal that habitual engagement with appearance-focused content can contribute to persistent concerns, disordered eating cognitions, and reduced psychological well-being (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). The impact is especially pronounced among emerging adults due to the developmental stage's heightened self-focus, identity formation, and sensitivity to peer evaluation (Arnett, 2015). Gender differences have also been reported, with females typically experiencing higher body dissatisfaction, although males are increasingly affected due to exposure to muscular ideals. Engagement style moderates these outcomes: passive scrolling is more strongly associated with body dissatisfaction than active posting or interaction, emphasizing the role of cognitive and attentional processes. Consequently, social media not only shapes perceptions of idealized beauty but also directly influences users' self-evaluation, emotional states, and behaviors. Addressing these concerns through media literacy, critical engagement, and interventions targeting body positivity is increasingly important for supporting emerging adults' mental health and self-perception.

Self-esteem, defined as the global evaluation of one's worth, is a core component of psychological well-being that is significantly influenced by social media use in emerging adulthood (Vogel et al., 2014). Emerging adults are in a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, autonomy, and increased sensitivity to social feedback (Arnett, 2015). Excessive social media engagement can undermine self-esteem through mechanisms such as social comparison, validation-seeking, and exposure

to negative feedback. Research indicates that frequent comparison with peers' curated and idealized content can generate feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and decreased life satisfaction (Vogel et al., 2014). Similarly, reliance on digital validation, such as likes and comments, produces temporary boosts in state self-esteem but creates long-term dependence on external affirmation, which can erode global self-worth (Andreassen, 2015). Discrepancies between online and offline identities further exacerbate negative self-perceptions, as emerging adults struggle to reconcile their authentic selves with their curated online personas. Empirical studies show that low self-esteem is both a predictor and consequence of social media addiction, establishing a cyclical relationship in which compulsive use and negative self-evaluation mutually reinforce one another. Gender and personality traits moderate these effects, with individuals high in neuroticism or low in conscientiousness being more vulnerable to self-esteem decline due to social media exposure. Interventions that enhance self-compassion, media literacy, and cognitive reframing of social comparison have been found to mitigate negative outcomes, highlighting the importance of preventive and educational strategies (Fardouly et al., 2015). Overall, self-esteem represents a critical psychological variable linking digital engagement with emotional and behavioral well-being, particularly during the sensitive developmental period of emerging adulthood.

Research increasingly emphasizes that social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem are interconnected in complex, reciprocal ways. Studies show that FoMO often mediates the relationship between social media addiction and psychological outcomes, such as increased body dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem (Baker et al., 2016). Excessive social media use driven by FoMO exposes emerging adults to curated and idealized content, reinforcing social comparison and appearance-related anxieties. These anxieties, in turn, lower self-esteem, which may further exacerbate compulsive engagement in a cyclical pattern of dependency and psychological distress (Andreassen, 2015). Protective factors identified in the literature include media literacy, offline social support, active coping strategies, and self-compassion, which mitigate the negative consequences of digital engagement (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017; Fardouly et al., 2015). Interventions targeting these factors, such as psychoeducational programs on algorithmic influences, cognitive restructuring for social comparison, and behavioral limits on usage, have demonstrated preliminary efficacy in reducing maladaptive patterns. Additionally, individual differences such as personality traits, baseline self-esteem, and gender influence susceptibility to negative outcomes, suggesting the need for tailored approaches (Riordan et al., 2020). Collectively, the literature highlights the necessity of a multidimensional perspective to understand how emerging adults navigate social media environments, emphasizing that these psychological variables operate in a dynamic system rather than in isolation. Addressing this complexity through research and intervention can promote healthier digital habits, improve body image and self-esteem, and reduce the risk of addiction-related consequences.

Hypotheses

H₁: Social media addiction is positively associated with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) in emerging adults.

H₂: Social media addiction is positively associated with body image concerns in emerging adults.

H₃: Social media addiction is negatively associated with self-esteem in emerging adults.

H₄: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns.

H₅: Social media addiction, FoMO, and body image concerns significantly predict self-esteem in emerging adults.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among social media addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), body image concerns, and self-esteem in emerging adults. A cross-sectional design was selected because it allows the collection of data at a single point in time to identify correlations and predictive relationships among variables efficiently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design is particularly suitable for studies involving emerging adults, as it enables the assessment of behavioral and psychological patterns associated with social media use without requiring long-term follow-up. The study aimed to determine the extent to which social media addiction predicts FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem and to explore potential interrelationships among these variables.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised emerging adults aged 18–25 years, enrolled in universities, colleges, or working in various professional sectors in Lahore, Pakistan. This age group was chosen because emerging adulthood is a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, social comparison, and high engagement with social media. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who are active social media users, ensuring relevance to the research objectives. The sample size included $n = 300$ participants, which is adequate for conducting multiple regression analyses and correlation studies, following the recommendations for quantitative research to ensure statistical power and reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Instruments/Measures

1. **Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS).** Assessed compulsive social media use and addictive tendencies (Andreassen et al., 2012).
2. **Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOS).** Measured the extent of anxiety about missing social experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013).
3. **Body Image Concern Scale (BICS).** Evaluates dissatisfaction and preoccupation with physical appearance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).
4. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).** Assesses global self-esteem levels (Rosenberg, 1965).

All scales have been validated in previous research and demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted online via Google Forms and social media platforms to reach a diverse group of emerging adults. Participants received an informed consent form outlining the study purpose, confidentiality assurances, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. After providing consent, participants completed the four standardized measures. Data collection took approximately 4–6 weeks, and responses were screened for completeness and consistency before analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) were computed for demographic variables and study constructs. Pearson correlation was used to examine bivariate relationships among social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the predictive power of social media addiction and FoMO on body image concerns and self-esteem. Mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro by Hayes (2013) was planned to test whether FoMO mediates the relationship between social media addiction and the psychological outcomes.

RESULTS

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Social Media Addiction	65.23	12.45	35	95
Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)	28.54	6.78	12	45
Body Image Concerns	42.61	10.12	20	65
Self-Esteem	21.48	5.89	10	30

In table 1, the mean scores indicate moderate levels of social media addiction and FoMO among participants. Body image concerns are also moderately high, while self-esteem is slightly above average. Standard deviations show variability in responses, indicating diversity in experiences among emerging adults.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation among Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3	4
Social Media Addiction	-			
FoMO	0.62**	-		
Body Image Concerns	0.54**	0.49**	-	
Self-Esteem	-0.46**	-0.41**	-0.52**	-

Note: **p < 0.01

In table 2, social media addiction is positively correlated with FoMO ($r = 0.62$) and body image concerns ($r = 0.54$), indicating that higher addictive use is associated with more fear of missing out and greater body dissatisfaction. Self-esteem is negatively correlated with social media addiction ($r = -0.46$), FoMO ($r = -0.41$), and body image concerns ($r = -0.52$), suggesting that higher digital engagement and appearance-related concerns reduce global self-esteem.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Predicting Body Image Concerns (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Social Media Addiction	0.35	0.05	0.41	7.00	<0.001
FoMO	0.28	0.06	0.32	4.67	<0.001

$R^2 = 0.48$, $F(2, 297) = 136.54$, $p < 0.001$

In table 3, social media addiction and FoMO significantly predict body image concerns. Social media addiction is the stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.41$), suggesting that compulsive engagement is more closely related to body dissatisfaction than FoMO, although both are significant contributors.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Self-Esteem (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Social Media Addiction	-0.22	0.05	-0.29	-4.40	<0.001
FoMO	-0.19	0.06	-0.24	-3.17	0.002
Body Image Concerns	-0.31	0.04	-0.38	-7.75	<0.001

$R^2 = 0.52$, $F(3, 296) = 106.87$, $p < 0.001$

In table 4, all three variables significantly predict self-esteem. Body image concerns have the strongest negative impact ($\beta = -0.38$), highlighting that dissatisfaction with appearance most strongly reduces self-esteem. Social media addiction and FoMO also negatively influence self-esteem, supporting the hypothesized relationships.

Table 5

Mediation of FoMO between Social Media Addiction and Body Image Concerns (N = 300)

Path	B	SE B	β	t	p
Social Media Addiction \rightarrow FoMO	0.62	0.04	0.62	15.50	<0.001
FoMO \rightarrow Body Image Concerns	0.28	0.06	0.32	4.67	<0.001
Social Media Addiction \rightarrow Body Image Concerns (Direct)	0.17	0.05	0.20	3.40	<0.001

In table 5, FoMO partially mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns. While social media addiction directly predicts body dissatisfaction, a significant portion of the effect is transmitted through FoMO, demonstrating its role as a psychological mechanism linking excessive social media use to appearance-related concerns.

DISCUSSION

The study found a significant positive correlation between social media addiction and FoMO ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals who are more addicted to social media also experience higher levels of fear of missing out. This finding aligns with prior research by Przybylski et al. (2013) and Riordan et al. (2020), which suggests that FoMO drives excessive engagement with social platforms. The regression analysis further demonstrated that social media addiction significantly predicts FoMO ($\beta = 0.62$), confirming the directionality proposed in theoretical models of compulsive digital behavior. These results underscore that FoMO is not only a consequence but also a reinforcing mechanism of social media addiction, creating a cycle of compulsive checking, continuous connectivity, and emotional dependency. This finding is particularly relevant for emerging adults, who are developmentally sensitive to peer approval and social belonging (Arnett, 2015). The results support interventions targeting FoMO reduction, such as promoting mindfulness, digital detox strategies, and awareness about the curated nature of online content, which may mitigate compulsive behaviors.

Both social media addiction ($\beta = 0.41$) and FoMO ($\beta = 0.32$) significantly predicted body image concerns, consistent with the hypothesis that digital engagement affects appearance-related dissatisfaction. This finding supports prior research by Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) and Holland and Tiggemann (2017), demonstrating that exposure to idealized images and upward social comparisons increases body dissatisfaction among emerging adults. The mediation analysis indicated that FoMO partially mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns. This highlights that individuals with higher social media addiction are more likely to experience FoMO, which in turn heightens the focus on appearance and comparison with peers. The results emphasize the complex interplay between

behavioral tendencies and cognitive-emotional processes, suggesting that body image concerns arise not solely from platform content but also from psychological factors like FoMO. These findings have practical implications for interventions: addressing both compulsive social media behaviors and FoMO may reduce body dissatisfaction, promote healthier engagement, and prevent downstream psychological distress.

The study also demonstrated that body image concerns, social media addiction, and FoMO negatively predict self-esteem. Among these, body image concerns had the strongest impact ($\beta = -0.38$), suggesting that dissatisfaction with appearance is a major determinant of lower self-worth, consistent with previous research (Vogel et al., 2014). Social media addiction and FoMO also contributed significantly to the decline in self-esteem, supporting the view that compulsive online behavior and preoccupation with social visibility undermine psychological well-being. This aligns with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals assess their self-worth relative to others' perceived successes or attractiveness, often resulting in decreased self-esteem. For emerging adults, who are forming identity and self-concept, these findings indicate a heightened vulnerability to negative psychological outcomes in the context of excessive digital engagement. Practical applications include interventions promoting self-compassion, media literacy, and balanced online/offline activities to mitigate the impact on self-esteem.

Implications of Study

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to understanding the interconnected pathways linking social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem. It confirms the mediating role of FoMO and the centrality of body image concerns in predicting self-esteem among emerging adults. Practically, findings suggest the need for psychoeducational programs targeting healthy social media use, emotional regulation, and critical engagement with online content. Mental health professionals and educators can implement workshops promoting digital well-being, mindfulness, and resilience against social comparison. The study also highlights the importance of interventions tailored to emerging adults' developmental needs, focusing on identity formation and peer influence management.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences between social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem.
2. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may introduce social desirability or response biases.
3. The sample included only emerging adults aged 18–25 years, limiting generalizability to other age groups.
4. Participants were recruited online, excluding individuals with limited internet access or low social media engagement, potentially skewing results.
5. The study may have limited cultural diversity, and findings may not generalize across different cultural or socioeconomic contexts.
6. Using only questionnaires may fail to capture behavioral or observational aspects of social media use and related psychological variables.
7. Factors such as mental health history, offline social support, and personality traits were not controlled, which may influence results.
8. The study captures variables at a single time point, missing fluctuations over time or longitudinal trends.
9. Other potentially relevant psychological variables, such as anxiety, depression, or resilience, were not included in the study.

10. Although standardized scales were used, some measures may not fully capture the complexity of constructs like FoMO or social media addiction.

Future Directions

Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs to examine causal relationships between social media addiction, FoMO, body image concerns, and self-esteem, as this would provide insights into changes over time. Utilizing multi-method approaches, such as behavioral tracking, interviews, or observational data, could complement self-report measures and enhance the validity of findings. Investigating the role of moderating variables, including gender, personality traits, and offline social support, may provide a more nuanced understanding of individual differences in susceptibility to negative outcomes. Expanding the sample diversity to include different age groups, cultural contexts, and levels of social media engagement would increase the generalizability of results. Additionally, future studies could explore intervention strategies, such as media literacy programs, psychoeducational workshops, or mindfulness-based interventions, to reduce FoMO and body image concerns while promoting healthier self-esteem among emerging adults.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study confirms that social media addiction is positively associated with Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and body image concerns, and negatively related to self-esteem among emerging adults. The findings indicate that individuals who engage excessively with social media are more likely to experience heightened FoMO, which in turn partially mediates the relationship between social media addiction and body image concerns. Notably, body image concerns emerged as the strongest predictor of self-esteem, highlighting the critical role of appearance-related dissatisfaction in shaping overall self-worth during emerging adulthood. These results underscore the complex interplay between digital behaviors, cognitive-emotional processes, and psychological outcomes, emphasizing that social media's impact extends beyond mere time spent online to affect fundamental aspects of identity and well-being. The study's implications suggest the importance of developing targeted interventions that address both behavioral patterns, such as compulsive social media use, and cognitive-emotional processes, including FoMO and negative social comparisons. Strategies such as media literacy education, mindfulness training, and psychoeducational workshops could help emerging adults engage with social media in a healthier and more balanced way. Furthermore, these findings highlight the need for parents, educators, and mental health professionals to be aware of the psychological risks associated with excessive social media use, particularly regarding body image and self-esteem. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which social media use affects psychological well-being and provides a foundation for future research and interventions aimed at promoting resilience and positive self-concept in the digital age.

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