

Social Media Is Triggering "Fear of Missing Out" Amongst The Youth, Precipitating Depression and Loneliness

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The Essay

Standing in a queue outside a government hospital, people were deeply absorbed in their cell phones, endlessly scrolling through social media. Among them stood a young girl named Jane, anxious because her phone had lost signal and she could not upload a photo of her whereabouts to her friends. The fear of missing out began to overwhelm her, yet those around her, who could have shared a comforting word, were themselves engrossed in their screens. This imagined scene mirrors the sobering reality of today's world, where social media has transformed human connection, leaving many young individuals feeling isolated amid virtual crowds. Since its inception, social media has evolved from simple communication platforms like Orkut and MySpace into vast digital ecosystems such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. What once promised connection has, paradoxically, intensified detachment. At the heart of this phenomenon lies the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a pervasive anxiety that others are living more fulfilling lives, triggered by social media. Social media is triggering the fear of missing out among youth, precipitating loneliness and depression, as it drives individuals to constantly

check their social media feeds, desperate to stay updated and relevant. Moreover, it also creates relentless pressure to keep up with digital trends, compelling users to maintain an idealized online identity. Not only this, but ^{youth} people display carefully curated versions of their lives. Others succumb to constant comparison; deepening feelings of inadequacy and alienation. This dependence on social media disrupts sleep, diminishes real-world communication; and fuels psychological exhaustion. Thus, social media is triggering the fear of missing out among youth, precipitating depression and loneliness, by trapping youth in cycles of comparison, pressure, ~~and~~ validation, and detachment from real world connection.

To begin with the understanding the link between fear of missing out, depression, and loneliness reveals how over engagement with social media fuels emotional instability. Overuse of these platforms often deepen feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, creating a vicious cycle where users constantly seek connection to relieve the very emptiness social media intensifies. The relationship between FOMO and mental issues forms a loop of dependency, each moment spent online amplifies the fear of being left out, driving youth to engage even more. This continuous cycle fosters heightened anxiety and loneliness. Thus, over engagement with social media stands as the first factor in ~~the~~ linking



fear of missing out to depression and loneliness. Secondly, constant comparison to others is another critical factor that explains the connection between FOMO, depression, and loneliness. On social media, individuals are continuously exposed to the highlight reels of others' lives. The endless stream of idealized content drains emotional energy and fosters feeling of inadequacy. The more time users spend comparing their reality to these filtered portrayals, the more their emotional resilience diminishes, leaving them vulnerable to depressive thoughts and isolation. Thus, constant comparison acts as a powerful catalyst in linking fear of missing out to depression and loneliness.

Thirdly, virtual interactions replacing real world relationships form a critical link between fear of missing out, depression, and loneliness. While social media creates an illusion of connection, it often lacks the emotional warmth and depth that come from genuine face to face interactions. As young people increasingly rely on virtual communication, meaningful social bonds weaken, fostering isolation and emotional emptiness. Thus, the substitution of real relationships with virtual ones amplifies the link between the fear of missing out, depression, and loneliness.

The above discussion highlights

The intricate relationship between the fear of missing out (FOMO), depression, and loneliness, showing how digital over-engagement erodes emotional well-being. Building upon this understanding, the discussion below will examine how social media triggers fear of missing out among youth, precipitating feelings of depression and loneliness, in an increasingly digitalized world.

Firstly, social media is triggering the fear of missing out among youth by driving individuals to constantly check their phones and online platforms, leading to heightened depression and loneliness. A study conducted at Quaid-e-Azam University examined the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), nomophobia (fear of being without mobile connection), and social media addiction among university students aged 18-26. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between FOMO and anxiety driven phone dependence, showing that individuals with high FOMO are more likely to feel distressed and isolated when disconnected from social media. Hence, it becomes evident that the constant urge to check phones, as intensified by social media use, triggers fears of missing out, which in turn precipitates feelings of loneliness and depression among the youth.

Secondly, social media is triggering fear of missing out in youth by



Creating immense pressure on youth to keep up with digital trends, which precipitates feeling of depression and loneliness.

The desire to stay updated with viral challenges, trending topics, or influencer lifestyle feels a cycle of anxiety. A research study by Franchina et al. (2018) explored relationship between FOMO and problematic social media use among adolescents.

The findings revealed that FOMO significantly predicted compulsive engagement with social networks, and "phubbing" behaviour was observed among the youth. This constant need to stay aligned with online trends increased anxiety and social detachment. Thus, the pressure to keep up with ever evolving digital trends on social media intensifies the fear of missing out, ultimately precipitating depression and loneliness among the youth.

Thirdly, social media is triggering the fear of missing out by showcasing carefully curated versions of life, which again inculcate the feeling of depression and loneliness among the youth. Individuals selectively share their happiest moments; travel photos, achievements, celebration, while concealing struggles and imperfections. A study by Przybylski et al. (2013) identified that such curated sharing fosters a pervasive anxiety of being left out, as individuals internalize

the illusion that others are constantly engaging in rewarding experiences. The research established a direct link between exposure to selective online content and heightened fear of exclusion, leading to compulsive social media engagement and deteriorating feeling of loneliness. Thus, the portrayal of curated and idealized lives on social media magnifies feelings of fear of missing out, precipitating depression and loneliness among the youth.

Fourthly, social media triggers the fear of missing out through constant comparison, which exacerbates feeling of loneliness and depression. A 2020 meta-analysis by Fabris et al., established a strong correlation between FOMO, social media, and emotional stress, revealing that individuals habitually compare themselves to others' online experience significantly higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms. The study emphasized that excessive exposure to idealized online content reinforces a sense of comparison, further intensifying depression and loneliness. Thus, the habit of constant comparison on social media acts as a psychological trigger of fear of missing out and solidifies feelings of depression and loneliness among the youth.

Moreover, social media triggers the fear of missing out by

increasing validation driven behaviour among youth, which solidifies feelings of depression and loneliness. The constant pursuit of likes, ~~and~~ comments, and shares has transformed online spaces into arenas of social competition, where self-worth becomes dependent on virtual approval. A study by Andreassen et al. (2017) revealed a strong link between social media addiction and declining self-esteem, showing that individuals who rely on online affirmation tend to experience higher levels of depression and emotional dissatisfaction.

Thus, the rise of validation driven behaviour on social media triggers fear of missing out, ~~and~~ perpetuating cycle of loneliness and depression among the youth.

Likewise, the social media triggers the fear of missing out by eroding real life communication skills, leading to the feeling of loneliness and depression among youth. As individuals increasingly depend on online communication, their ability to engage in genuine, empathetic conversations diminishes. Over time, this reliance on digital dialogue fosters emotional detachment and social awkwardness in real world settings.

Thus, the erosion of real life communication skills due to social media, triggers the fear of missing out, reinforcing the feeling of depression and

loneliness.

Additionally, social media triggers the fear of missing out by fostering emotional fatigue and cycles of anxiety, as users become trapped in a relentless loop of scrolling, reacting, and comparing. A study by Dogan and Tosun (2024) highlighted that fear of missing out (FOMO) and social media addiction jointly predict higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among university students. The research found that continuous exposure to social platforms without adequate emotional rest creates a state of chronic stress, where individuals feel both overstimulated and disconnected. Thus, emotional fatigue and anxiety cycles induced by social media triggers reinforce the fear of missing out, precipitating feeling of loneliness and depression.

Lastly, social media triggers the fear of missing out by disrupting sleep patterns, which in turn heightens feeling of loneliness and depression. The constant urge to stay connected and updated keeps individuals engaged late into the night, leading to poor sleep quality. A study by Elhai et al. (2020) found that Covid-19 related anxiety worsened due to the problematic use of social media, which fueled insomnia. This research indicated that individuals who frequently checked social media before bed



experienced heightened depression and difficulty in sleeping, further aggravating their sense of disconnection and low mood.

Thus, disruption of healthy sleep patterns caused by social media triggers the fear of missing out among youth, precipitating loneliness and depression.

Following this brief review of how social media triggers the fear of missing out among youth, precipitating feeling of loneliness and depression, the next section will outline key recommendations to mitigate the negative impacts of social media induced fear of missing out (FOMO).

~~To begin~~ The first major recommendation to mitigate the negative impact of social media induced fear of missing out (FOMO) is to take regular breaks from social media.

Periodic detoxes allow individuals to disconnect from endless flow of updates, notifications and comparisons that fuel anxiety and dissatisfaction. Even short breaks, such as designating phone free hours or avoiding social media before bedtime, can significantly lower stress and feelings of inadequacy. Thus, adopting regular social media breaks can mitigate the negative impact of social media induced FOMO.

Secondly, The second major recommendation to mitigate the negative impact of social media

induced FOMO is to encourage face to face interaction among youth. Genuine, in person communication fosters empathy, emotional connection, and a sense of belonging that virtual interactions often fail to provide. Studies in psychology reveal that physical presence and direct communication release oxytocin, the "bonding hormone", which enhances mood and reduce stress. Community events, group study sessions, or even family gatherings can help replace artificial sense of connection offered by social media. Thus, promoting face to face interactions mitigates the negative impact of social media induced fear of missing out (FOMO).

The third major recommendation to mitigate the negative impact of social media induced fear of missing out (FOMO) is to teach youth to critically assess the content they consume online. Developing digital literacy skills helps adolescents recognize that much of what they see on social media is curated, exaggerated, or filtered - far from real life. Thus, by cultivating critical thinking and digital awareness in youth, the negative impact of social media induced FOMO can be reduced.

Last but not the least, ~~the~~ another significant recommendation to mitigate negative impacts of social media induced



Fear of missing out (FOMO) is to cultivate habits of mindfulness and emotional regulation. Mindfulness allows individuals to remain present and self-aware, reducing the impulse to compare their lives with curated realities of others online. Alongside this, emotional regulation techniques help individuals to manage stress and negative emotions triggered by social media. Thus, cultivating mindfulness and emotional regulation mitigates the negative impacts of social media-induced fear of missing out (FOMO).

To conclude, it is undeniable that social media triggers the fear of missing out, precipitating loneliness and depression among youth. The constant urge to remain connected, the pressure to keep up with digital friends, and the obsession with curated perfection have created a cycle of emotional dependency and self-comparison. As youth scroll endlessly through idealized portrayals of others' lives, they drift further from genuine human connection, leading to depression, anxiety, emotional fatigue, disrupted sleep, and declining self-esteem. However, these effects can be mitigated through conscious action. Taking regular breaks from social media, encouraging face-to-face interactions, fostering digital literacy, and cultivating mindfulness can restore balance between the virtual and real world. The goal

is not to reject social media, but to reclaim control over it - to use it for connection rather than validation, and for inspiration rather than insecurity. Social media's influence is profound yet pliable; when approached with awareness, ~~and moderation~~, it can trigger fear of missing out and can be a source of anxiety and alienation. Thus, ~~social media is bad~~ Thus, it is evident that social media triggers the fear of missing out among youth, precipitating feelings of loneliness and depression.