

From FOMO to JOMO: A Literature Review on Social Media Disconnection and Its Role in User Ambivalence

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Abstract: Over-reliance on social media can lead to a unique phenomenon - Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), marked by anxiety about missing others' experiences. It is worth noting that users are engaging in social media disconnection, creating a positive psychological phenomenon - Joy of Missing Out (JOMO). This paper systematically analyses the dynamic relationship between FOMO and JOMO and the contradictory psychological and behavioural manifestations of users during the disconnection process through a literature review. The final conclusion is that social media use is positively correlated with FOMO and that there is a causal relationship. In this case, users' disconnection behaviour through social media can effectively catalyse the generation of JOMO. However, behavioural habits, psychological factors, social ties, and residual FOMO generate conflicting post-disconnection emotions. This also reveals the uncertainty of disconnection behaviour and provides theoretical support for the formulation of scientific disconnection strategies in the future.

1 INTRODUCTION

In modern society, where the digitalisation of information has become the norm, social media has penetrated almost every aspect of human life. However, social media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has created an unprecedentedly convenient scenario for instant communication; on the other hand, alongside the proliferation of digital platform engagement, psychological distress epitomized by FOMO has emerged (Przybylski et al., 2013). Research has increasingly focused on the psychological consequences of social media engagement, particularly how frequent use elevates FOMO. Studies demonstrate that heightened FOMO not only correlates with chronic social comparison but also undermines individuals' sense of belonging. In this context, social media disconnection behaviour has begun to emerge, and a new reverse psychological experience - Joy of Missing Out (JOMO), has gradually come into human vision. The introduction of this concept goes beyond merely illustrating users' emancipation from FOMO - induced distress to further illuminate their proactive pursuit of anxiety alleviation through self-focused strategies, while concurrently exposing the psychological paradoxes

inherent in social media connectivity and disconnection. Therefore, it is particularly important to re-examine the impact of social media on users' psychological experience from the perspective of social media disconnection.

Most existing studies have fully revealed the negative correlation between excessive social media use and FOMO, as well as the positive psychological effect of JOMO. However, most of them discuss the influence of the two independently or pit them against each other. To some extent, the discussion of the dynamic relationship between FOMO and JOMO and the psychological conflict of users in the process of changing from FOMO to JOMO has been neglected, especially the contradictory conflict of users' psychology under the influence of factors such as environment, social pressure, separation anxiety, and practical problems when disconnecting from social media, which makes it difficult to formulate precise and scientific intervention strategies at the practical level to alleviate users' anxiety.

This paper systematically explores the following core issues through a comprehensive correlation study: (1) The correlation and causal relationship between social media use and FOMO. (2) The generation of JOMO from the perspective of social

media disconnection and the relationship between FOMO and JOMO within the context of disconnection. (3) The factors that affect the contradictory psychological state of users after social media disconnection. By synthesizing prior research, this study interrogates how FOMO and JOMO coexist and conflict within digital platforms, while probing the psychological tensions underlying voluntary disengagement behaviors. These insights culminate in actionable recommendations for advancing scholarly inquiry.

2 CORRELATION BETWEEN FOMO AND THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to investigate the outlined objectives, the first thing that needs to be discussed in this paper is the correlation and causal dynamic connecting FOMO and the use of social media.

2.1 Social Media Perspective

From the perspective of social media, digital platforms provide users with interactive opportunities unrestricted by time and space, as well as access to social resources far beyond what was previously available. However, such platforms also enable content creators to share vast amounts of information. This information is often carefully designed and embellished by content creators (Zhang et al., 2021). This will trigger users, consciously or unconsciously, to make social comparisons with others in order to assess their own abilities, and to generate negative emotions such as jealousy, anxiety, and unease (Eitan & Gazit, 2024). Consequently, users will worry that they may miss some important information and beneficial experiences, leading to the emergence of FOMO, and then try to compensate for their negative emotions by increasing the intensity of their platform engagement and their urge to stay in touch with the beneficial experiences of others. Specifically, Zhang et al. conducted a meta-analysis of 65 publications encompassing 70 samples, 90 effects, and 61,893 individuals, and used a random effects model to verify its applicability through heterogeneity. The final meta-analytic evidence was that digital platform engagement elevated fear of missing out levels (Zhang et al., 2021). An online survey targeting a cohort of 230 Israelis was administered by Eitan et al., who employed two hierarchical regression analyses to clarify directional relationships between

key predictors and FOMO. Results indicated that participants reporting heightened FOMO engaged more frequently in online activities (Eitan & Gazit, 2024).

2.2 FOMO Perspective

FOMO is conceptualized by Przybylski et al. as 'a pervasive concern'—a persistent anxiety state rooted in fears of missing others' experiences or critical information (Przybylski et al., 2013). Within digital environments, users will increase their platform engagement intensity driven by a need to crave connection with others (Fioravanti et al., 2021). At the same time, belonging and seeking information are basic instincts and adaptive traits shaped by human evolution. When the satisfaction of these two needs is low or the driving force is insufficient, this deficit will exacerbate the user's FOMO. As a social tool that is essential for establishing social relationships and obtaining external information, social media is an outlet for users to satisfy their needs for belonging and seeking information (Roberts & David, 2020). In addition, Roberts et al. conducted a questionnaire survey on 107 participants and measured users' FOMO and social media intensity using relevant scales. For example, the measurement of platform engagement levels refers not only to duration and regularity. Roberts et al. used a six-item scale developed by Ellison et al. to assess platform engagement levels, which assesses users' emotional dependence on social media, their behavioural patterns, and the social relationships strengthened through social media, among other things, to quantify the depth of the bidirectional dynamics between users and platforms from multiple perspectives. A significant positive association was identified between heightened social media engagement intensity and elevated FOMO levels (Roberts & David, 2020). Similarly, people with high FOMO levels will be more active in seeking social opportunities on social media. A study involving 87 participants assessed for FOMO, Facebook usage, and emotional ambivalence revealed that individuals with elevated FOMO scores exhibited more frequent early-morning platform engagement (Przybylski et al., 2013).

As scholarly understanding of social media evolves, empirical investigations have increasingly delineated its psychological implications. Notably, a consistent positive correlation has been established between general social media engagement and FOMO. This relationship extends to problematic usage patterns, as evidenced by a meta-analytic

synthesis (Fioravanti et al., 2021). David and Roberts conducted two sets of experiments to manipulate social media engagement levels and FOMO-inducing conditions of platform engagement and FOMO, and concluded demonstrate a bidirectional causal interplay involving FOMO and digital platform engagement, with the two phenomena appearing to form a self-reinforcing cycle (David & Roberts, 2023).

2.3 Conclusion

The above summary empirically establishes that FOMO exhibits a robust positive correlation with social media use, with heightened engagement amplifying users' FOMO manifestations. Furthermore, FOMO is reciprocally identified as an intrinsic driver perpetuating compulsive platform engagement. Moreover, relevant literature has also clarified through experimental research that there is a two-way causal relationship between social media use and FOMO, and it seems to present a continuous feedback loop. If users get caught in the loop, their individual well-being will also decrease, and negative emotions such as anxiety and worry will also increase. Therefore, the urgent problem of how to improve users' happiness and prevent them from getting caught in a vicious cycle needs to be solved.

3 FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCONNECTION, THE GENERATION OF USER JOMO AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOMO AND FOMO

3.1 The Generative Effect of Social Media Disconnection on JOMO

Scholarly conceptualisations of disconnection exhibit significant contextual variability. Disconnection has been conceptualised heterogeneously across diverse events or contexts. Nassen et al. defined voluntary disconnection as 'conscious behaviour to disconnect from digital devices such as social media and email for a period of time or permanently' through a systematic review of different literature (Nassen et al., 2023). Its main characteristics are: autonomy, users may voluntarily disconnect actively because they want to improve the way they interact socially or

because they want to reduce distractions and online social pressures.

From a theoretical perspective, 'competence, autonomy, and relatedness' are considered to be basic psychological needs of humans in self-determination theory (Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO is often seen as a product of a lack of basic needs or a low level of basic needs. When individuals begin to voluntarily disconnect from social media, they make autonomous decisions to increase their control over their time and energy. This gives individuals a sense of self-control, thereby satisfying the need for autonomy. At the same time, when individuals voluntarily reduce low-quality social media activities and redirect their energy toward pursuing personal goals, they fulfill their psychological need for competence and experience the benefits of disconnection. Consequently, JOMO emerges as a psychological construct (Barry et al., 2023). In addition, Eitan et al. conducted an online survey of 230 participants using quantitative research methods, combining factors such as sample happiness, online engagement, and social comparison to analyse FOMO and JOMO. They ultimately found that when disconnected from social media, users tended to experience more positive emotions, which greatly promoted the generation of JOMO (Eitan & Gazit, 2024). Therefore, these findings indicate that voluntary social media disconnection serves as an effective pathway to achieve JOMO and sustain its enhancement. By disconnecting from social media, users will reduce their perception of related information and thus pursue internal satisfaction more. However, for permanent disconnection, this is highly unlikely. Users are more likely to find a balance through effective disconnection for a certain period of time, so as to further enhance their sense of happiness and concentration.

From the perspective of JOMO itself, it is often used as the conceptual antithesis of FOMO in many studies. JOMO is usually conceptualised as 'missed pleasure', which is more concerned with self-focus, satisfaction, and the freedom of disconnection (Barry et al., 2023). Conceptually, social media disconnection is a prominent feature of JOMO. In diametric opposition to FOMO, people with JOMO characteristics are more concerned with self-cultivation and self-identity, rather than connecting with others' experiences or information through frequent use of social media to compensate for their own needs. At the level of social comparison, as shown in the above review, users usually have a more intuitive evaluation of themselves based on the

internal drive to compare with others. This internal drive forces users to participate in social media more frequently in order to reduce uncertainty in the social sphere. An online survey analyzed through structural equation modeling revealed an inverse relationship between social comparison tendencies and JOMO (Eitan & Gazit, 2024). The characteristics of JOMO suggest that individuals with this mindset are more likely to engage in self-reflection rather than social comparison.

3.2 The Relationship Between FOMO and JOMO

In most literature, JOMO and FOMO usually present an antagonistic relationship (Jacobsen, 2021). However, this may not be the case in reality. Barry et al. conducted a survey on a sample of 507 adults aged 19 to 59 employing validated psychometric instruments, and further analysed the results using multivariate analysis methods and exploratory factor analysis. They ultimately found that both JOMO and FOMO both exhibit significant associations with social anxiety, while also revealing a moderate positive correlation between JOMO and FOMO in the sample (Barry et al., 2023). Therefore, from the perspective of social anxiety, both demonstrate notable links to social anxiety. However, the motivations and behavioural manifestations of the two are different. Users with FOMO will try to alleviate their anxiety by increasing their use of social media, as they are afraid of missing out on other people's experiences and opportunities to connect with society. They also focus more on what others are doing. The situation with JOMO is more complicated. Judging from the research results, JOMO's motivational underpinnings exhibit ambivalence. It may come from both active and independent choice (such as the pursuit of internal satisfaction and focus on the self) and from the user's feelings of unease and anxiety in the online social environment (such as being driven by social anxiety) (Barry et al., 2023). In this case, users may protect themselves by disconnecting or hope to reduce social interaction with the outside world in the form of self-isolation, so as to alleviate their social anxiety. Such users may focus more on what they need. FOMO and JOMO are moderately positively correlated, which indicates that FOMO and JOMO may not be simply opposed to each other, and their psychological motivation characteristics may be similar, for example, they both generate anxiety in the online social environment.

The relationship between JOMO and FOMO is not a completely static opposition. They may be at

opposite ends of the same spectrum, and users' positions on this spectrum on this spectrum may fluctuate dynamically depending on factors such as psychological state, environmental stress, and cultural background (Eitan & Gazit, 2024). It can be inferred that when driven by social anxiety, users are likely to use social media disconnection behaviour to relieve their inner anxiety and gain a sense of security. Some users may feel positive emotions brought about by focusing on themselves during the disconnection process, at which point their psychological state could tilt towards JOMO. Another part of users may feel lonely or insecure due to disconnection and choose to pick up their smartphones again, which may cause their psychological state to tilt from the middle of the spectrum towards FOMO.

3.3 Conclusion

From the above overview, it can be preliminarily concluded that social media disconnection is one of the effective ways for users to generate JOMO. However, when discussing the relationship between FOMO and JOMO, it is found that there may be a more complex invisible relationship between FOMO and JOMO. In this case, users may not simply disconnect based on positive factors. They may be influenced by factors such as social media pressure and social environment. This is also closely related to the contradictory mindset of users towards social media disconnection behaviour, as discussed below.

4 THE AMBIVALENT PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVES OF USERS IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING FROM FOMO TO JOMO FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCONNECTION

In the face of the increasing saturation of social media content, users' social media disconnection behaviour is rarely a binary opposition of "use it or not use it". It more represents a decision-making behaviour driven by a combination of complex psychological motives such as social pressure, self-protection, and fatigue.

From JOMO's perspective, users' social media disconnection behaviour is based on individuals focus

on and control of themselves and their pursuit of a sense of freedom when disconnected. However, this may not be the case for some users. Their social media disconnection behaviour may be influenced by behavioural factors (e.g. excessive use of social media, uneven time allocation, social privacy risks, etc.) or psychological and social environmental factors (e.g. social burnout, emotional stress) (Nassen et al., 2023). The result may not only be positive psychological emotions, but also complex negative psychological emotions caused by disconnection. Nguyen conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of 30 adults aged 21 to 39 who met the criteria of having engaged in at least one disconnection behaviour or having completely stopped using social media. When the motives for disconnection were discussed in the interviews with the sample, it was found that most users' motives for disconnection were triggered by the following factors. First, it is related to the social media platform or software used by the user, such as the homogenisation of information on social media platforms, which may make users lose interest in using social media, or the risk of privacy leaks within online environments. Second, it is influenced by the surrounding environment, such as feeling stressed and nervous when replying to others' messages. The third is the impact of changes in an individual's life situation, such as the need for users to balance work and family or the need to reduce social media use during important stages of life. These three reasons may have contributed to users disconnecting from social media (Nguyen, 2023).

From the perspective of FOMO, there is another possible motivation for users to choose to disconnect from social media. Individuals experience anxiety and increase their use of social media because they are afraid of missing important information or experiences from others. When some users become aware of their anxiety or social pressure during social media use, in this case, users actively choose to disconnect from social media, thus remaining unaware of some information or actively blocking it, which may alleviate the user's anxiety about perceived unknown messages.' Through a systematic meta-analysis conducted by Radtke et al., some research results showed that users' FOMO scores decreased when they disconnected from digital platforms, indicating that social media disconnection may have a beneficial impact on users' anxiety to some extent. However, some results showed that users' FOMO scores remained the same or increased

when they disconnected from social media (Radtke et al., 2022). From this point of view, the inconsistent research results reflect the two-sided effect of social media disconnection on individuals' FOMO levels.

These findings from studies with different FOMO scores also suggest that users may face a certain challenge when disconnecting. Their motivation to disconnect may recur, and they may pick up their smartphone again after that (Nassen et al., 2023). Nguyen et al. found in in-depth interviews that users' difficulty in disconnecting or maintaining a disconnected state is also affected by multiple factors. For example, based on real-life challenges, in the case of social media being closely linked to real life, disconnecting can make it difficult for users to participate in society, and they are worried about missing social connections and social network updates (Nguyen, 2023). In this case, FOMO becomes another barrier between users and social media disconnection. Users face a paradoxical dilemma: while grappling with anxiety fueled by the mixed effects of digital platforms, they remain tethered to these online spaces due to an ingrained reliance that complicates detachment.

Based on the above summary, it can be concluded that social media disconnection is not simply a matter of choosing to use or not use. Users need to face the dynamic impact of FOMO and JOMO, environmental dependence, and the challenges of real life. On the one hand, users may generate positive emotions of JOMO because they focus on themselves, their self-regulation ability improves, or they enjoy the freedom of disconnection. On the other hand, users may experience conflicting emotions due to complex factors such as social environment and pressure when disconnected. Even if users cannot generate positive psychological feelings while disconnected, they may be forced to engage in frequent social media use again due to multiple factors such as FOMO.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper reveals through a literature review that there is a positive correlation and causal relationship between social media use and FOMO, and that users will frequently use social media platforms due to the fear of missing out. This shows that excessive use can lead to a decrease in user happiness, and may form a negative cycle of "psychological anxiety and anxiety-driven social media use". A further review found that social media disconnection was an effective way for

users to generate JOMO. However, FOMO and JOMO were not dichotomous; some researchers suggested they might represent two ends of a spectrum. When users try to generate JOMO through social media disconnection, they will face the influence of multiple factors such as behavioural habits, psychology, and social factors, which will lead to multiple contradictory emotions such as a sense of loss of belonging, an increase in loneliness, and an increase in a sense of freedom, which makes it difficult for users to generate JOMO through social media disconnection behaviour, and even after disconnection, they will pick up their phones again. It can be seen that ambivalent psychology not only reveals the many real-life challenges that users face in the transformation from FOMO to JOMO, but also increases the uncertainty and risk of user behaviour. However, most of the existing research on which this article is based is cross-sectional lacking longitudinal dynamic research on the user's FOMO to JOMO conversion process, as well as tracking experiments on the disconnection threshold. Future research can build on this foundation to conduct disconnection tracking experiments, explore the dynamic psychological changes of users in the process of moving from FOMO to JOMO, and formulate scientific and sustainable disconnection strategies based on the results. Ultimately, this will help users find a balance between social media use and real life, and enhance their sense of well-being.

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