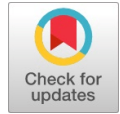# A Study on How Social Media FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) Impacts the Gen Z Audience

Debangana Chakrabarti

Abstract: Generation Z, or Gen Z, refers to people born between 1995 and 2010, often known as "zoomers," the first generation to fully embrace the internet. This paper focuses on the impact of social media-induced Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on Generation Z, blending with the characteristics of digital nativity and extensive engagement with social media platforms. Fear of Missing Out, or FOMO, was uniquely introduced in 2004 with the rise of social networking sites. It centers on anxiety and how, for Gen Z, this plays a pivotal role in making one feel absent from rewarding experiences. This study delves into the effects on mental health, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. It explores social media analytics regarding usage, compulsive checking, behavioural consequences, following trends, and real-life social interactions. The findings highlight the need for strategies to mitigate FOMO's adverse effects, promoting healthier social media habits and fostering a more balanced approach to digital consumption.

Keywords: FOMO, Social Media, Media, Anxiety.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is a part of new media and refers to digital platforms and applications that enable users to share, create, interact with content, and connect with people worldwide. Popular social media include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, which facilitate communication, social networking, content sharing, and community building. Social media has transformed how people interact with one another, access information, and perceive the world, making it a central part of modern life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Pew Research Center, 2021) [1,2,3] [29] [30] [31] [32] [33].

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon often characterized by anxiety in which an individual feels excluded from rewarding experiences that others have. It reflects a deep-seated concern about being left out or missing important social interactions or events.

The years 1995-2010 are given to Generation Z or Gen Z, which refers to "zoomers" since they zoomed into the internet world (Dimock, M. (2019) [4]). This blend has a deep-rooted connection with social media, the rapid growth of technology, and the evolution of the internet.

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This evolution or change has not only altered social interactions, communication patterns, and lifestyles but also made us dependent on the internet world. The phenomenon of Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) has evolved with psychological concern. This particular phenomenon took its birth in 2004 with the rise of social networking sites, dealing with anxiety and how individuals perceive themselves as being excluded from rewarding experiences shared by others (Twenge, J. M. (2017) [5]).

Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed communication, providing instant connectivity and a diverse array of content. These platforms enable users to share their lives, opinions, and creative works with a global audience. However, the pervasive exposure to others' curated lives can heighten feelings of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), especially among Gen Z. This generation, having grown up with ubiquitous access to digital technology, is particularly susceptible to the pressures and anxieties associated with social media. Social media offers a diverse array of content, from sharing lives, opinions, and creative works with a global audience in a serious way to serious context portrayal via memes. However, the pervasive exposure to others' curated lives can heighten feelings of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), especially among Gen Z. This generation, having grown up with ubiquitous access to digital technology, is particularly susceptible to the pressures and anxieties associated with social media. Before social networking became mainstream, people were already sharing content online through chat rooms and tripod pages. Six Degrees, though the first social networking site, couldn't stand much longer in the market as a very low percentage of people used the internet in 1997. By 2002, several internet users had grown to over half a billion with the rise of Friendster, the second social networking site. Myspace saw an incline in users, but the real upgrade started in 2004 with the invention of Facebook. Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed communication, providing instant connectivity and a diverse array of content. These platforms enable users to share their lives, opinions, and creative works with a global audience. However, the pervasive exposure to others' curated lives can heighten feelings of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), especially among Gen Z. This generation, having grown up with ubiquitous access to digital technology, is particularly susceptible to the pressures and anxieties associated with social media. The addictive nature of social media has amplified feelings of FOMO for Gen Z, creating a constant "what's happening around me" thought. This study examines how it impacts mental health, compulsive checking behaviour, psychological well-being, and how digital consumption affects this generation.

Ultimately, the study endeavours to highlight the importance of developing strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of FOMO, promoting healthier social media habits, and fostering a more balanced approach to digital engagement.

FOMO can result in compulsive behaviours, such as incessant checking of social media feeds and a constant fear of being left out. This anxiety can adversely affect mental health, leading to stress, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. The drive to stay connected and updated can create a dependency on social media, further exacerbating these issues.

For Gen Z, social media is a double-edged sword. While it offers unparalleled opportunities for self-expression, learning, and connection, it also presents significant challenges to mental well-being. Understanding the dynamics of social media and FOMO is essential for developing strategies to foster healthier digital habits. Encouraging a balanced approach to social media use, promoting real-life interactions, and enhancing digital literacy can help mitigate the negative effects of FOMO and improve the overall well-being of Generation Z.

In addition to examining the rise and implications of FOMO, this research will delve into the historical context of social media's evolution. Before the mainstream adoption of social networking, online content sharing occurred through chat rooms and early web pages. Although Six Degrees was the first social networking site, its limited user base in 1997 hindered its success. By 2002, the number of internet users had surged to over half a billion, paving the way for the rise of Friendster. Myspace soon followed, but the true revolution began in 2004 with Facebook, which set the stage for the modern social media landscape.

This comprehensive study seeks to underscore the importance of understanding FOMO's impact on Generation Z. By examining the interplay between digital consumption and mental health, we aim to highlight the significance of developing strategies to counteract the adverse effects of FOMO. Ultimately, fostering healthier social media habits and a more balanced approach to digital engagement will contribute to the overall well-being of this generation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Evolution of Social Media

The evolution of social media began before mainstream adoption, with early online content sharing occurring through chat rooms and personal web pages. The first notable social networking site, Six Degrees, launched in 1997, but its limited user base hindered its success (Boyd, D. (2014) [6]).The landscape began to shift in 2002 with the rise of Friendster, capitalizing on a burgeoning internet user base that had grown to over half a billion. Myspace quickly followed, offering more personalized user experiences. However, the true revolution in social media began with the launch of Facebook in 2004. Facebook's innovative approach to social networking, emphasizing real-world connections and user-friendly interfaces, set the stage for the modern social media ecosystem, leading to the widespread adoption and diversification of social media platforms we see today (Ellison, N. B. (2007) [7]).

B. Impact on Generation Z

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, has grown up with the internet and social media as integral parts of their lives. This generation's unique digital upbringing makes them particularly susceptible to the pressures and anxieties associated with FOMO. Social media offers Gen Z unprecedented opportunities for self-expression, learning, and connection but also presents significant challenges to their mental well-being. Understanding the dynamics of social media and FOMO is crucial for developing strategies to foster healthier digital habits among this generation (Jones, H. (2020) [8]).

C. Conceptualization of FOMO

The concept of FOMO comes out as an emotional response as others are receiving rewarding information and are satisfied with that, whereas the sufferer misses the reward and is less satisfied and mostly depressed with the thought of FOMO(Abel, J. P., Buff, C. L., & Burr, S. A. (2016)[9]). FOMO is generated by the amygdala, the part of the brain that detects whether or not something is a threat to survival. This part of the brain perceives the impression of being left out as a threat, creating stress and anxiety. "(Przybylski et al. (2013) [10])define FOMO as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, and it is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing."

D. Social Media Usage and FOMO

The more the use of social media, the more is FOMO. Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat provide a curated version of an individual's life, which can include moments of joy, success, failure, happiness, and more. This illumination of feelings or emotions provides constant exposure that highlights others' reels, which further creates exclusion and inadequacy among others. Przybylski et al. (2013) found a strong correlation between social media usage and increased levels of FOMO, suggesting that the more time individuals spend on these platforms, the more likely they are to experience FOMO. Since Gen Z are digital natives and heavy users of the internet, it is seen among this generation mostly.

E. Psychological Impacts of FOMO

The negative psychological outcomes of FOMO have been linked with decreased life satisfaction, anxiety disorders, lower self-confidence, and depression (Oberst et al., 2017) [11]. Social comparison theory provides a framework for understanding these effects; individuals frequently compare their own lives to the idealized portrayals they see online, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction (Festinger, 1954) [12]. Due to FOMO, Gen Z has been facing compulsive checking disorders, where one constantly monitors social media to avoid missing out on recent updates or trends. Digiday suggests, "The unique thing about Gen Z is that while millennials have grown up with social media, Gen Z has grown up with video-first social media" (Digiday, 2019) [13].

F. FOMO and Behavioural Consequences

Since Gen Z's audience has been prioritizing online interactions over face-to-face engagements, this leads to a paradoxical decrease in social connection despite having digital communications (Vogels, 2019) [14]. The agitation to constantly check on social media trends and to participate in popular activities like Q&A sessions, polls, surveys, and reel-making results in the homogenization of experiences, in which authenticity is compromised just for social validation (Marwick, 2015) [15].

G. Compulsive Social Media Use

Social interactions and updates rapidly create compulsive social media checking every minute. This behaviour has been recognized as problematic social media use, which creates negative psychological effects (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017) [16]. Research indicates that interventions promoting digital literacy and mindful social media use can help mitigate these effects, encouraging healthier engagement with digital platforms (Lin et al., 2018) [17].

III. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore how social media-induced Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) impacts Generation Z. The methodology consists of in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather rich, detailed insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions.

A. Data Collection

Interviews: Six Generation Z individuals (aged 20-26) were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of social media usage patterns and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing for flexibility in probing deeper into the participant's personal experiences with FOMO. The interview guide included questions about social media habits, feelings of FOMO, psychological impacts and perceptions of social media authenticity.

Focus Groups: Two focus groups, each consisting of eight participants from the initial interview pool, were formed to facilitate group discussions and uncover collective experiences and social dynamics related to FOMO. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and reactions to social media trends, FOMO experiences, and its impact on their mental health and social behaviours. Focus group discussions covered topics such as the influence of social media trends, the emotional impact of missing out, strategies for managing FOMO, and the role of social media in their daily lives.

B. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Participants' anonymity was maintained by assigning pseudonyms and ensuring that personal information was not disclosed. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. By employing a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews and focus groups, this research provides comprehensive insights into the experiences of Generation Z with social media-induced FOMO, highlighting the psychological and social dynamics involved.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Interpretation and Qualitative Findings

The qualitative approach of research used in this finding with primary data as interviews and focus groups has provided an in-depth analysis of what GenZ thinks about social media-induced FOMO, which reveals an unbiased perspective on how social media trends and how they are consumed with content. GenZ is more interested in making trendy reels, and memes that share news. Every GenZ audience is attracted to particular content or rather genre and if they somehow miss a chance of BTS trendy fashion or new beats then FOMO is generated and eventually end up having low self-esteem and anxiety. There is a notable increase in the global adoption of Korean fashion, characterized by the fusion of comfort and style. This trend is reshaping fashion norms, encouraging people to prioritize both aesthetics and practicality. Korean culture's influence extends beyond fashion, impacting global entertainment and lifestyle choices and GenZ's audience tends to be up-to-date with such trends. The rise of 30-second filmmaking on social media platforms presents a new form of storytelling. This format challenges creators to convey compelling narratives within a limited time frame, fostering creativity and innovation. It is particularly beneficial for music artists, enabling them to showcase their work in engaging, easily consumable snippets. The rise of 30-second filmmaking on social media platforms presents a new form of storytelling. This format challenges creators to convey compelling narratives within a limited time frame, fostering creativity and innovation. It is particularly beneficial for music artists, enabling them to showcase their work in engaging, easily consumable snippets again creating GenZ's awareness of their surroundings and to be well informed every second.

B. Personal Experiences with FOMO

Participants have shown exclusion and inadequacy triggered by comparing their lives to the curated portrayals of others on social media. FOMO is observed to have a deeper emotional response to perceived social rejection and influencers share moments of joy, success, and adventures which heightens the pressure to conform to idealized standards, resulting in a constant need to be a part of the online social sphere. Participants have shown heightened anxiety, stress, and depression related to use of social media use. "It consumes me, always lurking in the back of my mind. It isn't just about missing out on parties or exciting events; it's more about the uneasy feeling of being left out of the loop as if everyone else knows something I don't. As a first-year college student, FOMO used to be a constant presence in my life." (Nguyen, A. (2023) [18])

The pressure to maintain an engaging online presence and keep up with social media trends often leads to a loss of authenticity and self-esteem. Participants mention feeling overwhelmed by the constant influx of information and the need to continuously update their social media profiles to stay relevant and connected.

One respondent directly links FOMO to a decline in confidence and self-respect, indicating that the constant comparison facilitated by social media can lead to negative self-perception. For some individuals, FOMO leads to decreased confidence, self-respect, and chronic dissatisfaction, aligning with existing literature that links social media-induced FOMO to negative psychological outcomes. These respondents likely experience the detrimental effects of constant social comparison and the pressure to keep up with peers, which can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

Conversely, the responses indicating no impact of FOMO suggest that individual coping mechanisms and mind-sets play a crucial role in mediating its effects. Respondent 6's strategy of focusing on the present and appreciating what they have reflects a resilience approach, which can serve as a protective factor against the anxiety associated with FOMO. This aligns with research suggesting that mindfulness and a positive outlook can buffer against the negative impacts of social media.

These varied experiences highlight the need for tailored strategies to address FOMO's mental health implications. For those negatively affected, interventions might include promoting digital literacy, encouraging mindful social media use, and fostering environments that support self-compassion and resilience. Conversely, understanding the coping strategies of those less affected by FOMO can inform broader mental health initiatives, emphasizing the importance of present-focused thinking and gratitude practices.

C. Perception of Social Media Authenticity

Social media authenticity has always been in question in their experiences of FOMO. Content is curated with the awareness that does not fully represent the reality of people's lives. Constant checking of social media is not wholly reliant on authenticity but the adrenaline of dopamine rush of having new updates or rather gossips (Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2016) [19]).

D. Educational Interventions

Recently programs have taught digital literacy and emotional resilience is equipped by it where young individuals with the skills to navigate social media more effectively. Learning social media trends and marketing creates a pathway for young minds to even perform and earn. This emphasizes the curated nature of social media content and the importance of maintaining a balanced perspective on online interactions (Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012) [20]).

E. Limitations and Further Research

Though the qualitative approach provides rich,detailed insights into what GenZ are affected by social media t it is important to note that the findings are not generalized to all chosen participants in the interview and focus groups. Many are not mentally affected by FOMO but are addicted to checking their phone for social media notifications.
"4.8 billion people use social media and 210 million people suffer from social media addiction, meaning 4%-5% of users are addicted to social media worldwide" (Keller, J. (2023) [21])

Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample to capture a wider range of experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The study of how social media's Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) impacts Generation Z (Gen Z) reveals significant insights into the psychological and social dynamics of this generation. Our research indicates that while FOMO is a pervasive phenomenon among Gen Z, its effects vary widely among individuals. A considerable number of Gen Z individuals experience negative mental health impacts due to FOMO, including decreased confidence, self-respect, and persistent dissatisfaction (Przybylski et al., 2013; Oberst et al., 2017). This aligns with existing literature highlighting the detrimental effects of social media-induced FOMO on psychological well-being (Przybylski et al., 2013). The responses indicate a spectrum of FOMO's impact on mental health, from significant negative effects to minimal or no impact. This variability underscores the complex interplay between social media use, individual psychology, and coping mechanisms (Beyens et al., 2016) [22].

Addressing FOMO's mental health implications requires a multifaceted approach that considers individual differences and promotes strategies for healthier social media engagement and mental resilience. The qualitative findings of this study underscore the profound impact of social media-induced FOMO on Generation Z, revealing the complex interplay between online interactions, psychological well-being, and social behaviors (Przybylski et al., 2013; Oberst et al., 2017). By understanding the personal experiences and coping strategies of this generation, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to promote healthier social media habits and enhance the overall well-being of digitally native individuals (Huang, C. (2017) [23]). Encouraging authenticity, providing mental health support, and fostering a balanced approach to digital engagement are crucial steps in mitigating the adverse effects of FOMO. Some individuals effectively mitigate FOMO's impact by focusing on the present and maintaining a positive mindset (Beyens et al., 2016) [24]. These coping strategies highlight the importance of resilience and mindfulness in managing social media's influence. Despite the pervasive nature of social media trends, many individuals do not feel excluded when not participating. This suggests that while social media trends are influential, their impact on feelings of exclusion varies based on personal engagement and social contexts (Elhai, J. D., Levine, J. C., Dvorak, R. D., & Hall, B. J. (2016) [25]). To further combat the negative effects of FOMO, it is essential to develop educational programs that promote digital literacy and emotional intelligence. These programs can equip individuals with the tools needed to critically evaluate social media content and develop healthier online habits (Dempsey, A. E., O'Brien, K. D., Tiamiyu, M. F., & Elhai, J. D. (2019) [26]). Additionally, fostering environments that support offline social interactions can help balance the time spent online and reduce the dependency on virtual validation (Baker, Z. G., Krieger, H., & LeRoy, A. S. (2016) [27]). Encouraging open conversations about the unrealistic nature of social media portrayals can also help demystify the curated lives that often contribute to FOMO (Rozgonjuk, D., Sindermann, C., Elhai, J. D., & Montag, C. (2020) [28]).

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Funding	No, we did not receive it.
Conflicts of Interest	No conflicts of interest to the best of our knowledge.
Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate	No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence.
Availability of Data and Material	Not relevant.
Authors Contributions	I am only the sole author of the article.

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